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- Speed up your downloads
- Claim 50Mb free Web space
- Turn your site into an earner

28 PAGES! BUYERS' GUIDES

- 350 top ISPs head-to-head!
- New modems, MP3 kit tested
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Unlimited 24/7 FTP Access	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Anonymous FTP Support	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
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HOME PAGE

MEET THE TEAM...

THE PEOPLE WHO WRITE THE UK'S LEADING NET MAGAZINE, PRACTICAL INTERNET

Thomas Watson

TECHNICAL EDITOR

From modems and monitors to MP3s and MPEGs, Thomas is on the ball when it comes to the latest technologies.

James Thornton

STAFF WRITER

An ace at demystifying the Net's trickiest topics and also getting to the heart of breaking news stories.

Clive Parker

TECH SPECIALIST

A professional Web site designer and Internet stalwart, Clive answers your toughest tech questions.

James Seabright

WEB SITE DESIGN SPECIALIST

The man behind our Web site building advice, James provides tips on how to create perfect online pages.

Jo Cole

SENIOR SUB EDITOR

The backbone of the magazine, Jo ensures the magazine's production process runs smoothly and efficiently.

Mark Shufflebottom

ART EDITOR

Mark's flair for turning pages of prose into colourful, eye-catching works of art is evident in our features and tutorials.

Lee Watkins

ASSISTANT DESIGNER

With a sharp eye for detail and design, Lee ensures our pages are always easy-to-read and provide you with advice in the best way possible.

Why pay when you can get it for free?

WELCOME TO JUNE'S edition of your favourite Internet magazine, which is filled to the brim with money-saving advice and freebies.

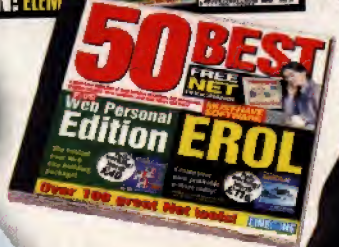
We've compiled a selection of 50 Internet programs that no Web user can be without – and all of them are on the cover CD-ROM and featured in *Must-have Software* on pages 30-36. Enjoy!

The money-saving theme is continued in *Unmetered ISP Deals* on pages 48-53, where the latest batch of low-cost Net providers are pitched head-to-head. Find out whether you could be saving big bucks by ditching your existing service and switching to one of our dirt cheap dozen.

If your PC is in need of a long-overdue tune-up then *Upgrade Your PC Free Online* (pages 42-47) is essential reading. Find out how to use the Net to fix and upgrade your computer in just minutes!

Remember to let us know what you think of the magazine – we thrive on your feedback.

Mark Newman, Editor
mnewman@paragon.co.uk



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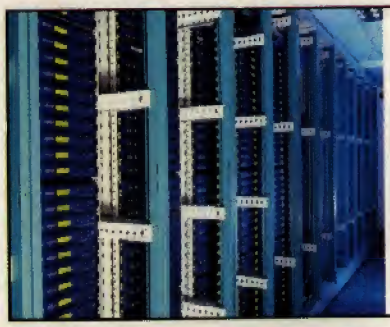

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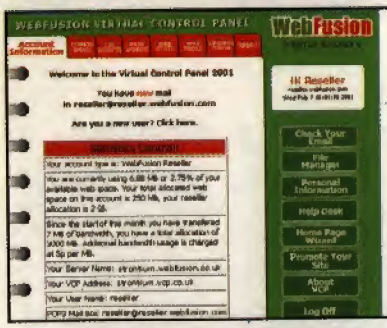

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By partnering with WebFusion to host our own clients, we are able to provide an additional, profitable service without incurring technical or infrastructure costs. WebFusion's service is of very high quality, and extremely flexible, so we can be confident that each client receives the best possible web hosting at the best possible price.

As well as a considerable additional revenue stream, partnering with WebFusion has rounded out our service offering, and opened up opportunities to provide total presence management on behalf of our clients, again, without any technical overhead to us.

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Will Stevens, MD Infotex UK

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144 on the CD

Full products

EROL 2 ..... Fully working
Web! Personal Edition ..... Fully working

Must-have software

1st Page 2000 ..... Freeware
Accelerator Plus 4.3 ..... Freeware
Active Marks ..... Freeware
Active URLs ..... Freeware
AOL Instant Messenger ..... Freeware
Arachnophilia ..... Freeware
Atomica ..... Freeware
AudioGrabber ..... Freeware
AVG Anti-Virus 6.0 ..... Freeware
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FasyMTU ..... Freeware
eGenie ..... Freeware
F-Quill ..... Freeware
Fudora 5 ..... Freeware
FreeAgent 1.2 ..... Freeware
Gate Keeper 3.2 ..... Freeware
GifClean32 ..... Freeware
HTML Kit ..... Freeware
HTML Optimizer ..... Freeware
HTTrack ..... Freeware
ICQ ..... Freeware
Inoculate IT ..... Freeware
Internet Explorer 5.01 ..... Freeware
LeechFTP ..... Freeware
MSN Messenger ..... Freeware
Naviscope. Not supported in Win 95 ..... Freeware
NeoPlanet 5.2 ..... Freeware
Neotrace ..... Freeware
NetMeeting 3.0 ..... Freeware
Netscape 6 ..... Freeware
Opera 5.02 ..... Freeware
Outlook Express 5 ..... Freeware
Power Archiver ..... Freeware
Putty ..... Freeware
QuickNews Bar 1.0 ..... Freeware
Real Player 8 ..... Freeware
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ZoneAlarm ..... Freeware

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LOOKING TO BUILD a fantastic Web site or add some pizazz to Web browsing? This is the section of the magazine for you

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If you enjoyed our spotlight on Photoshop Elements, enter our competition to try and win a copy

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Subscribe to make sure you never miss an issue – and save yourself some dosh into the bargain!

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infonation
THE COMPLETE INSIGHT INTO ALL THINGS INTERNET

Who's watching you?

AS THE GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES ITS ANTI-CRIME UNIT, CONCERNS GROW AMONG INTERNET USERS OVER ITS INTERNET AND EMAIL SNOOPING ABILITIES

The Government has officially launched the National Hi-Tech Crime Unit in an effort to combat online crime and investigate online criminals such as hackers and paedophiles.

To achieve this, it will take advantage of a number of recently-passed laws which allow police to monitor email and Internet traffic.

"New technologies bring enormous benefits to the legitimate user, but also offer opportunities for criminals, from those involved in financial fraud to paedophiles," said Jack Straw at the launch. "We are determined that the UK will be the best and safest place in the world to conduct and engage in eCommerce."

But these legitimate Internet users may have cause for concern at the latest increase in Government access to our online communications. Some Internet experts see the unit's launch as a further extension of intrusive Internet monitoring laws.

"Last year, the news broke that the security service MI5 was building a $37 million facility that will have the power to monitor all email sent and received in Britain," said WorldPay boss David Sear. "This means the government can have access to your personal email and encrypted data – and in our electronic era that may be anything from your love letters to the details of your last medical exam."

Clean conscience?

Of course, many would argue that so long as you've done nothing wrong, you've nothing to hide. But such laws will do little to inspire public confidence in the confidentiality of their details online. "Personal privacy will soon be something that appears to be an anarchic human right," warns Sear.

However, considering the amount of effort taken to monitor people online, it's impossible that we're all being watched by government spies. But users should still be careful to remember offline laws while they're on the Web. The ISP Totalise recently brought a case against two financial Web sites, Motley Fool UK and Interactive Investor International, when defamatory comments were posted on the sites' message boards. A court upheld Totalise's argument that the sites should release the identity of the person who posted the comments, so it could then proceed to take further action.

Complete anonymity on the Web can cause problems, and Cliff Stanford, founder of Demon Internet, believes it's not ideal. "The answer is probably pseudo-anonymity. In that case, the Web site has the records, but doesn't actually publish them unless they are forced to," he says. "It's much the same in real life, I can walk down the street with anonymity, but if I'm arrested then I have to provide my details."

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR ONLINE PRIVACY

1. Try not to give personal details to Web sites. Whenever you do, click the box to avoid receiving junk mail.
2. Encrypt your email. Try using **www.hushmail.com** to keep your email safe from prying eyes.
3. Use secure passwords. A really secure password should have 13 characters (or more) with randomly alternating alpha and numeric characters.
4. Use secure servers for transactions. Check for a padlock at the bottom of the screen, or 'https://' in the URL.
5. Safeguard your signature file on your emails. Be sure to limit the information that you make available in your signature file.

YAHOO! STAMPS OUT PORN

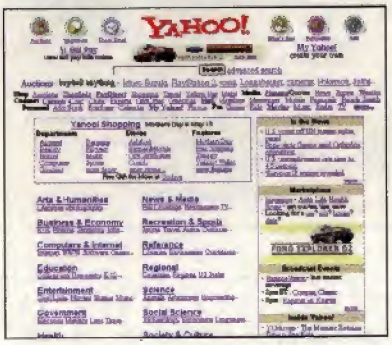
SEARCH ENGINE BOWS TO PRESSURE AND DELETES ADULT MATERIAL

IN A LANDMARK move, Yahoo! has deleted all adult videos and DVDs on its shopping pages and made it more difficult to find adult chat rooms.

Yahoo! has reconfigured its adult-themed online clubs, message boards and chat rooms and removed links to them. Users believe the clubs will fail to attract new members and ultimately disappear.

Yahoo! spokesman Jackson Holtz said the company has made several changes as "part of the evaluation of adult content across the network."

Yahoo! has also stopped accepting banner ads, classifieds and auction items with adult themes and promised to more aggressively police sex-related message boards and clubs.



Yahoo! has deleted adult shopping products and made it more difficult to find sex-related chat rooms

Never enough

But conservative groups say Yahoo! isn't doing enough to keep its sites clean, especially its GeoCities pages, where users can upload any pictures and content. Although Yahoo! expressly forbids nudity and pornography on GeoCities, the company doesn't take down violators' sites unless someone complains directly.

"They have some hard-core Web sites, including those that pander themselves as child sex and teen sex," said Jan LaRue, Senior Director of legal studies for the Family Research Council.

Yahoo! isn't alone in trying to figure out what to do with adult content. Lycos recently clarified its user agreement and is re-evaluating its porn policies, said Jeff Strawbridge, Director of Customer Service.

HIGH FLIERS GET LOGGED ON

BRITISH AIRWAYS AND Virgin are preparing to sign up to a deal which will allow airline passengers to log on to the Net during flights.

The proposed deal will also allow passengers to take their laptops onboard and log on to local radio and TV stations, or link directly to their offices. BA, Virgin, Lufthansa and Singapore Airlines are known to be very interested in the system and are likely to make a decision shortly.

The idea is expected to be launched this year in the US on routes between major cities, followed by north Atlantic routes – including those to New York and London – in 2002. This will require a satellite link above the Atlantic, which is currently being developed.

A recent business survey found that 80 per cent of the travelling public considers having access to email important while flying. Furthermore, 71 per cent would switch airlines to get connected.

LineOne's Italian job

ITALIAN ISP TISCALI has confirmed it is buying free ISP LineOne in a deal worth £62.3 million – but users of the ISP are unlikely to notice any changes.

The ISP, which was previously jointly owned by BT and United Business Media, has been up for sale since the end of last year. Tiscali – which also bought the UK arms of LibertySurf and World Online in earlier deals – says it plans an extensive investment programme to establish itself as one of the UK's top three ISPs.

With more than 1.85 million registered users, LineOne was revamped in December in a bid to target the 30 to 45-year-old age group. It featured celebrities including Ruby Wax and Joan Collins as online columnists.

When announcing their decisions to sell, BT and UBM said they were proud of what the portal had achieved but had decided to refocus their businesses, with LineOne no longer fitting into their plans.

news in brief

INTERNET NEWS SNIPPETS

☐ Virgin Mobile and Bush Internet have joined forces to save consumers 40% on mobile phones and set-top boxes. The two companies claim to have put together a 'complete communications package' – an Internet set-top box and a mobile for £79.99, which saves customers around 40% off the two items when sold separately.

☐ **BBC Sport will offer digital TV viewers access to an interactive version of July's Wimbledon tennis tournament. As it is the only UK broadcaster to offer digital TV services on all three major platforms, the BBC claims that its coverage of Wimbledon 2001 will ensure that viewers experience "all the excitement of being at the Championships, without leaving their armchair".**

☐ Web site owners who upload sexually explicit photos onto the Net will have to gain consent of the photos' subjects if proposed new laws get the go-ahead in the US. The legislation pits itself against the popularity of viewing nude photographs of celebrities such as pop star Britney Spears (pictured) on the Net.

☐ **Macromedia (www.macromedia.com) has released Director 8.5 Shockwave Studio, allowing site developers to create 3D-enhanced Shockwave content for the Net. The new studio features a new version of the Shockwave Multi-user Server along with Flash integration and the ability to stream RealMedia content. The software costs £949 (+VAT) for new users and £149 (+VAT) for those upgrading from Director 8.**

☐ Software company Serif (www.serif.com) is back under British ownership in an effort to meet increasing consumer demand for digital image editing and Web publishing tools. The company, which produces packages such as WebPlus and 3DPlus, has announced a successful management buyout of its US and European development, marketing, sales and fulfilment operations and now intends to expand its software range with three new products later this year.

news in brief

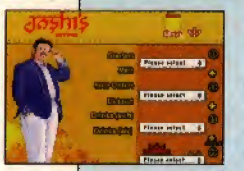
A BRIEF LOOK AT THE MOST HAPPENING NET STORIES FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

☐ Online recruitment site ClickAJob (**www.clickajob.co.uk**) is offering job seekers the chance to search all the UK's top job portals with just one click. Users of the new search engine can access over 60,000 daily postings from the UK's top job portals, and can request email alerts with details of suitable vacancies.

☐ **The BBC has successfully launched an online holiday shopping portal for interactive TV users. Users of the Telewest iTV service can now track down the latest travel information and snap up holiday bargains through their television thanks to the beeb.com site (www.beeb.com). The corporation is now looking to add more of its online shopping services to ITV.**

☐ Employees are coming under fire for spending too much time writing emails to work colleagues. A new report, published by Gartner (www.gartner.com) has revealed that workers spend an average of 49 minutes each day managing email. The study concluded that over a third of internal business email is unnecessary, a trend that Gartner describes as "occupational spamming".

☐ **Net users will soon be able to order a vindaloo online, thanks to a national curry delivery service on the Web. The service, run by Joshi's Kitchen (www.joshiskitchen.com), has set up a successful trial in Reading and the company now intends to create 300 food preparation centres around Britain to ensure extensive coverage and speedy delivery.**



☐ Virgin.net (www.virgin.net) has closed one of its networks so it can offer flat-fee unmetered Net access and broadband services to its customers in the future. People using the old Cable & Wireless network will have their accounts moved to the ntl network. the ISP hopes to provide broadband access by the end of the year.

APPLE LAUNCHES SECOND iBOOK

NEW SLIMLINE MAC LAPTOP UNVEILED

THE LATEST EDITION of Apple's iBook has been launched, promising to be thinner, lighter and cheaper than its predecessor.

The new slimline machine comes in four versions, each identical in colour and appearance but with a choice of CD, DVD or CD-RW drive for burning music CDs, or a 'Combo' DVD/CD-RW for burning CDs and watching movies. Support will also be provided for AirPort, Apple's wireless networking system. This allows cable-free Internet access.

The latest model features a 500Mhz PowerPC G3 processor and is just 1.3 inches thick. It boasts a 12 inch screen which can show 1,024 by 768 pixels, and is stocked with 64Mb of memory.

"The new iBook builds on the success of the original iBook and is designed to fit today's digital lifestyle," said Apple Chief Executive, Steve Jobs.

If you want further details of the new iBook, they are available from **www.apple.com.**

Browsing boom

THE NUMBER OF British homes with Web access has now hit 9 million, according to a new study.

The latest figures from Netvalue (**www.netvalue.com**) show that over 37 per cent of UK households now have an Net connection, with the total number of home users topping 12 million for the first time.

The results also show that people are spending more time online. The average is over ten days a month – the highest ever recorded. The number of women online is also on the up, with just under 5 million females using the Net in a month.

ADD SOUND TO YOUR SITE

XARA ONLINE, THE instant Web site creator, has launched a new Audio Message 'module' that allows anyone to listen to or post audio onto a Web site using a computer microphone.

The feature is one of several modules designed to 'plug' into any site regardless of the authoring tool being used. No downloads are necessary.

The new module lets you quickly create high quality audio and then in one snippet of code put it onto any site. See **www.xaraonline.com** for a demo.

stat attack

WHICH UK POLITICAL PARTY HAS THE FASTEST LOADING WEB SITE?

Source: Keynote Systems analysis of Labour.org.uk, Conservatives.com and Libdems.org.uk

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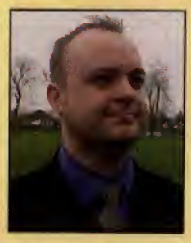
Net WATCH



Chris Ellison looks at the latest cases of Internet injustice

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY HAS fallen victim to copyright protection. In April, Edward Felten, Professor of Computer Science at Princeton, was prevented from presenting a paper. This followed legal threats from the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and the Secure Digital Music Initiative (SDMI).

In September 2000, the SDMI mounted a challenge to crack any of four copyright-protection technologies it had developed. The successful challenger would receive a reward of $10,000. Felten and his colleagues managed to crack all four, but withdrew after being required to sign a non-disclosure agreement to continue. When they came to present their work at the conference, the RIAA/SDMI warned them that to do so "could subject you and your research team to actions under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA)".

Felten decided not to go ahead with the presentation, but added: "We remain committed to free speech and to the value of scientific debate to our country and the world. We believe people benefit from learning the truth about the products they buy. We will fight for these values, and for the right to publish our paper."

The DMCA is a major blow to free speech. It makes criminals out of those who don't want industry to control how they use digital information. By posing the issue as one of copyright, organisations like the RIAA can do a lot of damage to free speech. It's not just academics that lose out when freedom of speech is taken away.

Internet Freedom can be contacted at campaign@netfreedom.org. The campaign's Web site is at www.netfreedom.org

Al Fayed scores Net triumph

FOOTBALL CLUB OWNER WINS LEGAL CASE AGAINST CYBERSQUATTERS

PREMIERSHIP NEWCOMERS FULHAM are celebrating victory off the pitch following a battle for the domain name fulhamfc.com.

The name of the football club, owned by Mohammed Al Fayed (right), had been registered by a Central American company in 1998 with the intention of creating an online 'fun club'. However, no such site materialised and a judge at the World Intellectual Population Organisation (WIPO) has now ruled that the respondent, Belize Domain Services had "no legitimate interest in the domain name".

This case follows the growing number of football clubs and associations contesting the use of their trademarks on the Net. Recently, Juventus and the English Football Association have all won WIPO decisions. The official Fulham site can be found at www.fulhamfc.co.uk.

Jason Robinson

CELEBRITY BOOKMARKS

THE RUGBY SUPERSTAR TELLS US HOW HE'S TACKLING THE NET...

How long have you been browsing the Net?
I've been online for about 10 months now. I can't say I connected because I'm great with computers, but I like the idea that there is a lot I can learn at the touch of a button. I can also check up my weekly column on www.teamtalk.com.

Did you find it easy to get started?
At first it was a case of trial and error, because I wasn't used to computers. But it didn't take long to get the world at my fingertips. A lot of children know a good deal more than I do, though!

Do you think there should be censorship on the Internet?
Certainly. I think that there are a lot of bad things on there that are too easy to access. All it takes is entering the wrong word into a search engine and you could be into something seedy or bad. It should be monitored, but how do you monitor something that size?

Have you ever bought anything over the Internet?
No, I haven't. I just don't know if I would be happy to send my details over the Internet. I'm worried people can get access to your financial details, so I have refrained from that.

Is it true England rugby union coach Clive Woodward emails his players to let them know who is in the squad?
I had heard that used to be the case, but since I have been involved selection has happened in a meeting with the players.

You would rather be told face-to-face?
Yeah, you never know what's going on even over the phone. People can leave messages that can be fakes so you have to be careful. Sometime you just don't quite know what is going on so it is always better face-to-face.

Talking about phones, do you use your mobile much?
Yes, I do use it often, and after hearing of my inclusion in the British Lions squad I don't think it will stop ringing! It has occurred to me that the higher my profile is raised, the more the phone rings.

Is there any one site that you or your children gravitate to?
Not really, the good thing about the Net is its diversity, you can find out virtually everything. I am interested in Christianity, and can find out the viewpoints of various people. I can go into things for the children and print them off. If you are thinking about moving house you can get the details. You can do everything, really.

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on the front of this issue

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LINEONE

Terms and conditions apply. Subject to availability. BT line required. Can be used with BT SurfTime, BT Surf Together and BT Talk and Surf Together.

news in brief

A LOOK AT THE LATEST INTERNET NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

☐ Insurance broker 1st Quote (**www.1stquote.co.uk**) has promised a cash refund of up to £25 for online customers who switch their home insurance from their bank or building society to its service. The scheme applies to anyone who uses the site to request a quote and then goes on to take up a policy worth more than £100.

☐ **Virgin Radio (www.virginradio.co.uk) has launched an online version of its non-stop party show, Wheels of Steel. The show is accessible 24-hours a day from the Virgin Radio site, promising disco favourites from the likes of Abba, Kool & the Gang, and Right Said Fred. It will also feature streaming audio of the on-air broadcast of the show.**

☐ Adobe (**www.adobe.com**) has launched the latest version of its eBook reader, allowing people to view digital books from the Web. The Adobe Acrobat eBook Reader 2.1 features CoolType font rendering technology and a two-page layout feature. It also boasts a built-in interactive dictionary for looking up words at the click of a mouse button.

MOONFRUIT PUT UP FOR SALE

ONLINE WEB SITE CREATOR LAYS OFF STAFF AS IT LAUNCHES NEW SOFTWARE

A NEW VERSION of popular online site creation tool, Moonfruit, has just launched – despite the company's announcement that it is up for sale.

Many industry pundits were surprised by the news, especially as the site claims to be one of the 15 most frequently used sites in the UK with more than 38 million page impressions a month. The company claims it is not in financial trouble and has taken the decision to seek a merger with a larger company

in order to preserve its business in the current gloomy dot com climate. Plans to make 40 of its 45 staff redundant, however, seem to indicate otherwise.

Despite the company's problems, it has gone ahead with the launch of version three of its Web site creator. The new features include no adverts on finished sites, 20Mb of Web space and improved music functionality including new jukebox widget.

There's also more choice on page layout – for example, the navigation menu can sit on the left or the right of the screen – while the actual page can extend in length and have a scroll bar if you want. There are also additional widgets and content to add to your site. For more, see **www.moonfruit.co.uk**.

Web addresses to shrink

TYPING LONG-WINDED email addresses and URLs could become a thing of the past thanks to a new service.

CommonName (**www.commonname.com**) has launched Internet Identity for Life, a free service that replaces email and Web site addresses with simple words or names, chosen by users.

To send an email, users can type a CommonName, like 'John Smith' into their email client rather than the full address. To access a Web site, visitors need only type the site's name such as 'Yahoo', into the browser's address bar.

The service is compatible with all major browsers and email packages.

HARD WIRED

Product: CRX10U-RP
Price: £349
Contact: www.sony-cp.com

RE-WRITE THE RULES

SONY'S LATEST GIZMO allows you to copy CDs in the palm of your hand. The device is the first ever battery-powered, portable CD-R/RW and can easily be hooked up to your computer (PC or Mac) to record files onto disc. You can then chill out to your digital grooves on the move with the built-in Audio and MP3 CD player.

Product: HN1300
Price: From £999+VAT
Contact: www.hitachi-software.co.uk

SECURITY WITH STYLE

FIGHTING THE WAR against network raids, Hitachi's latest notebook PC combines hard-hitting security, classy looks and speedy performance. The new machines feature the services of tough-nut software Triunet, which is armed with a range personal firewall and security utilities. The suite contains network access control, anti-intrusion, and filtering facilities.

Product: FinePix 4800 Zoom
Price: TBA
Contact: www.fuji.co.uk

FINE ART

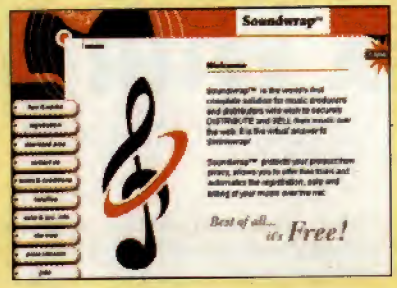
THE FINEPIX 4800 from Fuji is sensitive. In fact, its enhanced sensitivity means you can afford to dispense with a flash, even in poor lighting conditions. The camera is home to a 4.3 megapixel Super CCD chip which, when coupled with the device's improved signal processing means crystal-clear snaps can be produced that accurately depict nature's true shades.

A LEGAL WAY TO DISTRIBUTE YOUR MP3 MUSIC

WRAPTECH HAS INTRODUCED a method for musicians to upload their music to the Web, without the fear of Napster-style widespread theft. The Soundwrap scheme (**www.soundwrap.com**) is claimed to be the first complete Digital Rights Management solution that allows legal and secure distribution of MP3 files.

Based on the patented Wraptech file encoding method, Soundwrap allows music makers to register their song with the service, shrinkwrapping it in the process. Anyone downloading the song will only be able to hear a pre-determined section, before being asked to purchase the full version.

Payment functionality is included within the Soundwrapped MP3 to ease the strain of purchasing. No additional download is required, for the user will already have the full version, and paying for the song merely 'unlocks' it. Interestingly, the makers of Soundwrap also maintain that the encryption method works on hard drive serial numbers, preventing people from copying files from computer to computer.



PRICES FALL IN DEEP BLUEYONDER

TELEWEST HAS SLASHED the price of its super-fast, always-on broadband Internet service, Blueyonder (**www.blueyonder.co.uk**).

The monthly rate for the high speed connection will be reduced to £25 for new customers who also take out Telewest's additional residential services. Those who sign up to Blueyonder alone will continue to pay the standard price of £33 per month, while the £50 connection fee will remain the same.

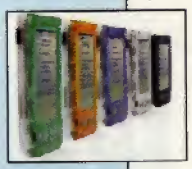
Existing Blueyonder will also be able to take advantage of the reduced rates if they subscribe to the additional Telewest services.

This latest changes by the cable operator are likely to put pressure on BT to slash its broadband prices. The telecoms giant currently charges users of its ADSL service £40 a month. The telecom regulator, Oftel, claimed in January that this monthly rate was among the highest in the world.

news in brief

A LOOK AT THE LATEST INTERNET NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

☐ Handspring (**www.handspring.co.uk**) has cut the price of its most popular handheld computers. Prices for the infinitely expandable, pocket-sized Visor Deluxe have been dropped from £199 to £169. The handheld lets you instantly turn an organiser into a music player, voice recorder or even a digital camera through its Springboard expansion slot.



☐ **Budding Flash animators are being given the chance to see their work on TV and the Web. Cartoon Network has launched its Online Animation Awards (www.CartoonNetwork.co.uk/Awards) and is offering prize money worth £10,000 plus guaranteed screenings on the small screen for the top entry.**

☐ Microsoft's new operating system, Windows XP, will be released on 25 October. Never one to hype products, Bill Gates says the product will deliver "a new standard in power, reliability, security and simplicity." The operating system will contain new features such as a personalised welcome screen.

Product: ScanMaker 4600
Price: £117
Contact: www.microtekeurope.com

SKILLED SCANNING

SENDING PHOTOGRAPHS OF your exploits to friends and family is easy thanks to today's crop of scanners. The 4600 comes bundled with Ulead Photo Explorer software, for effortless uploading to the Web. With an output resolution of 1200x2400 dpi, this latest ScanMaker delivers crisp images even when you're enlarging to mammoth proportions.

Product: eXpanium EXP401
Price: TBA
Contact: www.expanium.philips.com

TINY TUNES

PHILIPS HAS JOINED the minimalist-revolution by announcing the world's smallest MP3-CD player. Squaring up at a teeny 8cm, the device lets you play CDs with up to three hours of compressed digital audio. Your musical pleasure shouldn't be affected by bumpy journeys either, as the eXpanium contains a 100-second music buffer.

Product: Amigo PD-600C
Price: £399.99 +VAT
Contact: www.peripheralcorner.co.uk

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

THE NEW WIRELESS Internet-ready Amigo says 'adios' to miles of cable and becomes the world's first PDA to boast a PCMCIA type II slot which, when combined with a GSM or GPRS PC card, lets you browse the Web, trade emails and even make mobile phone calls. Powered by a 206Mhz Intel processor, the device includes a colour screen.

inspiration

Take a break with the Web

BLOW AWAY THE COBWEBS WITH A SHORT BREAK TO ONE OF BRITAIN'S VERY OWN HOT SPOTS THANKS TO THE BEVVY OF TRAVEL RESOURCES AVAILABLE ONLINE

If you're finding that your free time is being taken up by weekend-long spring cleaning sessions or car washing marathons, maybe it's about time you had a break from the mundane routine.

As the weather starts to perk up (we hope) it's a great time to make up a packed lunch, slip your shades on and head off for a bit of fun on a relaxing jaunt.

In order to set you on your merry way, the Net can help you plan and organise your trip so all you have to worry about is having a good time. So whether it's a long weekend in the countryside, foot and mouth permitting of course, or just a day-long city break, the Internet can help you sort out where to go, how to get there and what to do once you arrive.

Choosing a retreat

While the old-fashioned trick of closing your eyes and sticking a pin in a map can be an exciting way to decide where to go, you'll probably end up somewhere a lot more pleasant if you put your faith in the Internet.

A good general place to start planning any trip you make within our own fair Isle is Visit Britain (**www.visitbritain.com**), which is the official site of the British Tourist Authority. It contains enough ideas about places to visit, upcoming events, and activities to get even the most well-travelled person worked up about the UK's rich tapestry of sights and sounds. The UK Travel Guide (**www.ukguide.org**) can also help you kick-start your adventure as it contains an A-Z guide full of tips on accommodation, sightseeing and motoring.

If it's a cultural break that you're after, it's worth checking out what's going on in the big smoke, and Virtual London (**www.virtual-london.com**) will lead you by the hand on an online tour of its famous streets. However, if you don't fancy the hubbub of the capital then a fairly comprehensive guide to finding the best landmarks in England's urban and rural districts is available from the Local Government Web index (**www.oultwood.com/localgov/england.htm**).

If you long to be by the seaside then you could do worse than have a look at the Good Beach Guide (**www.goodbeachguide.co.uk**) which is run by the Marine Conservation Society. The site contains reviews of Britain's cleanest coastlines and is searchable by region, meaning you can hit the surf without running the risk of swallowing any nasty organisms.

Getting there

Once you've chosen where you're going, you'll obviously need to navigate Britain's perilous transport system. This is made easier thanks to the wealth of useful materials available online. Motorists can plan their routes down to the last detail with services such as Street Map (**www.streetmap.co.uk**) or MultiMap (**www.multimap.com**), which gives directions to any UK destination from a start point.

Take a sneaky peak at Britain's top attractions and pick up holiday ideas from Visit Britain

If you decide to take the more picturesque route by hopping on the train, it's probably best to check timetables, delays and fares before you leave on Railtrack's site (**www.railtrack.co.uk**). Alternatively, if you fancy a trip on the EuroStar, or even a cheap cruise to visit our European neighbours, you can pick up some bargain crossings to France from Euro Drive (**www.eurodrive.co.uk**).

Before you leave though, like any boy scout worth his salt, it's important to be prepared for anything and that includes being ready the chance of a monsoon-like deluge. Get updated with the BBC's weather service (**www.bbc.co.uk/weather**) and don't forget to pack the brolly.

Arranging a place to stay

The Net can be used to track down somewhere to lay your weary head for the night and helps you find accommodation that is best suited to you, whatever your comfort requirements or travel budget might be. The AA provides details of over 800 UK hotels on its site at **www.theaa.co.uk/hotels**. You can perform a tailor-made search for accommodation based on the area you are travelling to and the price range you're looking for. You can then check out the facilities that are available at all the establishments and view the AA's own rating of the food quality. Tucked Up.com (**www.tuckedup.com**) is another useful

accommodation resource and contains a stock pile of information on over 1,400 Bed and Breakfasts throughout the land. The site allows you to book online once you have chosen a suitable place to bunk for the night.

Alternatively, if your idea of a good break is a countryside frolic à la Barbara Windsor and Kenneth Williams, then why not plan a trip with Camping and Caravanning UK (**http://camping.uk-directory.com**)? The organisation provides a meaty database of British camp sites and also offers details of caravans for sale and a handy directory of equipment retailers.

Tucked Up helps you find a place to get a relaxing forty winks in the setting of your choice

TEN GREAT DAYS OUT ON THE WEB

Alton Towers
www.altontowers.co.uk
Whiten those knuckles with an interactive tour of the park.

National Trust
www.nationaltrust.co.uk
Information on over 300 venues.

Canal Junction
www.canaljunction.co.uk
Useful guide to exploring Britain's waterways.

UK Biking
www.bikinguk.net
Outlines all the hot spots for having fun on two wheels.

UK Climbing
www.ukclimbing.com
Comprehensive guide to scaling some of Britain's craggy peaks.

Lastminute.com
www.lastminute.com
The 'experiences' section of the popular site offers special deals.

Go Ireland
www.goireland.ie
Handy resource for getting around Ireland.

Legoland Windsor
www.legoland.co.uk
Book tickets through the Web site.

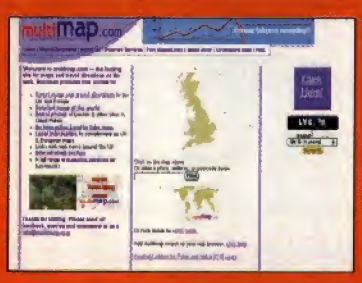
RSPB
www.rspb.co.uk
Features a searchable database of some of Britain's best bird watching haunts.

Zoos UK
www.zoos.50megs.com
Information on all of Britain's major zoos and wildlife parks, including opening times.

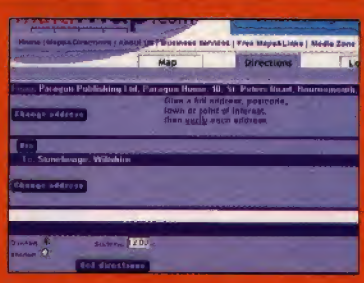
Getting to the hotspots with MultiMap

Online maps

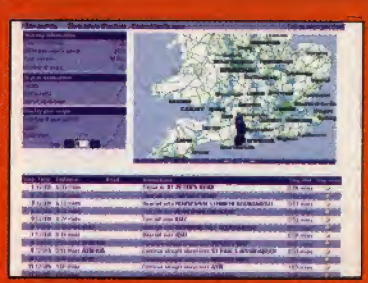
TRYING TO FIND the quickest path to get to where you're going can be tricky if you just rely on Ordinance Survey maps and road signs. Multimap.com can take away this bother and give you precise directions on the speediest way from A to B and will even tell you how long the journey is likely to take.



Firstly, enter the 'Maps and directions' area of the site at **www.multimap.com** and click on the 'Directions' tab. Now type in the name, postcode or address of both your starting point and destination.



You will be asked to confirm each location, which you can do by clicking each of the 'Verify address' buttons. Now enter the time you wish to depart at and click the 'Get directions' button.



You should now be presented with a map and instructions for each stage of the journey ahead. By opting for the white icon next each step, you can then access a detailed street map of the area.

BACK CHAT

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT PRACTICAL INTERNET AND THE NET IN GENERAL. EMAIL US AT **PI@PARAGON.CO.UK** AND YOU COULD WIN A WEBCAM

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT THE MAGAZINE OR THE INTERNET IN GENERAL? HERE'S YOUR CHANCE. EMAIL US AT PI@PARAGON.CO.UK OR POST YOUR LETTERS THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY TO *PRACTICAL INTERNET*, PARAGON PUBLISHING, PARAGON HOUSE, ST PETER'S ROAD, BOURNEMOUTH, DORSET BH1 2JS

Competition winners

Congrats to the five lucky winners of our issue 53 competition to win a Microtek scanner. They are N Loriaux, S Watts, Brian Goodwin, Miss Lim and Anthony Murray.

Meanwhile, John Witchard and C Heywood will each be receiving a copy of Dreamweaver 4/Fireworks 4 Studio shortly after winning *Practical Internet* issue 52's reader survey draw.

Hearty congratulations to you all!

Letter of the month

Every month, the best letter we receive will win a splendid ZoomCam Webcam (pictured below). The camera is ideal for all sorts of multimedia applications including video capture, video mail and videoconferencing. Available in USB, PPC or ISA versions, these cameras are perfect for bridging the gap between distant family, friends and colleagues.

Letter of the month

Your free book saved me!

I'm not usually one to write to magazines, nor am I one to buy magazines simply because of the goodies attached to their covers. Indeed, this was the case when I bought issue 53 of *Practical Internet*. I bought your magazine for the first time because of its great content and interesting articles.

The issue was sporting a free handbook, *Fixed!*, for easing Net problems. "No", I said to myself, "great CD but I've not had any problems with Internet connections so probably won't use it."

It was tossed to the back of my drawer. But, bugger me, within four hours a message popped up on my PC "modem not detected... switched off or not installed properly."

After 45 minutes of tinkering I hadn't solved the problem so I thought to myself "Oh jeez, where's that book?" Five minutes later, after reading your helpful advice (remove modem and let Windows redetect it) I was back up and running again.

And that's not all – my connection speed has gone up from 33,600bps to 49,333bps. That was £3.99 very well spent. Many thanks. I'm off for some swift surfin'

Richard Gardner

Result! You weren't alone in finding that book useful, Richard. Keep reading and your free Webcam is on its way.

Emailing a CV

Thanks for your article, Find a New Job Online (issue 53, *Practical Internet*). You recommend that job applicants send their CVs in Rich Text Format, but I've a better idea. It's possible to send your CV, including a photo, as an HTML email.

The trick is to build the CV as a simple Web page. Scan a photo of yourself and save it as a GIF or JPEG. Centre this at the top of the page. Place your text in simple tables and centre them as well. Select all and copy. Paste into your mail message. The recipient opens his mail to find your photo and CV integrated in the message pane, rather than being sent as an attachment.

It looks good and prints perfectly. You even have the chance to edit it before hitting the 'Send' button.

So what's the catch? Well, it works only in Netscape – Outlook Express won't support cut and paste HTML. I haven't tried it with any other mail programs but readers are welcome to have a go.

David M Kiely

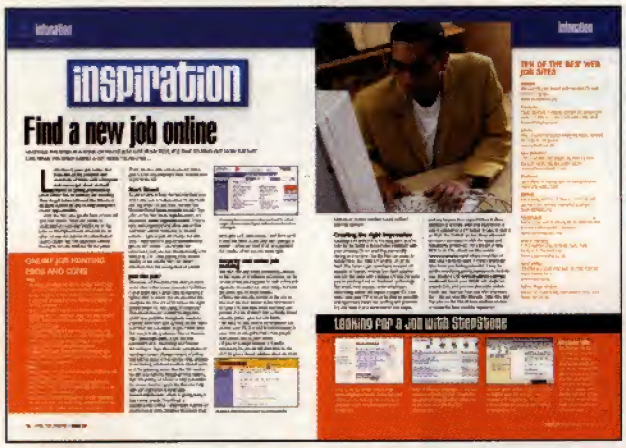
You can email your CV as an HTML document like this, but raw text messages are safer

Since not all Web users use email programs that can recognise HTML, your potential employer might see your message as a page of ugly source code rather than neatly designed text and images. We'd recommend you send your CV as a text document and provide a link to a Web site displaying your photo and other information. It's better to be safe.

Teach yourself a lesson

Issue 53 of *Practical Internet* was excellent, but can I point out an omission in your 'Inspiration' feature about finding a new job online?

The sites mentioned were the big ones that always rank highly on search engines like Fish4jobs and Monster. I bet your researchers never looked at eteach (**www.eteach.com**), a



Finding a new job is a doddle with the Net – as we showed you in issue 53

teacher recruitment site that offers much more than just jobs for teachers. It's an excellent new resource that also has fun, informative forums, a UK educational search engine, resources and a large team of people who run it. Don't take my word, have a look…

Johan De Silva

A great site for teachers everywhere, Johan. We'll write 'Must include eteach.com in all future job seeking features' 50 times and stay late to make up for its omission!

Award winning stuff

I wanted to thank you for publishing the article 'Win Awards for your site!' in issue 53 of *Practical Internet*.

I am sure that those who offer award programs, regardless of where they live in this global community, will appreciate it, as well as Webmasters who are seeking recognition for their site. People would be amazed at how many hours the dedicated award program owners spend in reviewing sites.

Award Sites! (**www.awardsites.com**) was developed to establish standards and to assist those interested in having their sites acknowledged. Moreover, it has continued this intent into other areas. You can visit **www.awardsites.com/information.htm** for a detailed purpose statement.

David Bancroft, Owner, Award Sites!

Thanks, David. Sad though it is, many sites still put far too much emphasis on the quantity of content they offer, rather than the quality of it. So Web award schemes like yours that separate the good from the not-so-good are welcome indeed.

Spread the word…

I wonder if you'd consider mentioning my protest song

We told you how to win heaps of Web site awards in April's issue of Practical Internet. You can order a back issue by filling out the form on page 177

WEB WATCHDOG

BEWARE OF THE DOG!

BEEN RIPPED OFF BY AN ISP OR ONLINE SHOP AND CAN'T GET A REPLY? SEND YOUR PROBLEMS TO OUR CANINE CONSUMER CRUSADER AT **WATCHDOG@PARAGON.CO.UK**

Goodbye to another unmetered ISP. Connect25 has gone bust

Can't connect with Connect25

I have been using the unmetered service provider Connect25 (**www.connect25.co.uk**) since last October without too much trouble.

Last week, though, I received a letter from them telling me the service was being 'upgraded' and that I would need to download and connect through some new Connection Manager Software. They also said that the service would include a sponsorship window featuring a leading search engine.

The existing freephone number would be discontinued and the software would use an encrypted, new freephone number. I followed the instructions, but found that I couldn't connect. For the next five days I emailed, faxed and phoned Connect25 non-stop but never received a response.

The phone numbers were constantly engaged and because BT is unable to monitor either 0800 numbers or 0702 numbers, it is impossible to tell if the phone is off the hook. I contacted the Leicester Chamber of Commerce who advised me that they had been told by someone other than Connect25 that Connect25 were 'on the move'. Since installing the Connection Manager software, the ISP's site now shows a link to NameZero (a domain name company) and an offer to remove the advertising if you sign up with them.

Although I personally haven't lost money, I would really like to know if Connect25 are still alive. On an altruistic note, the site implies they're still up and running and taking money in advance.

I would really appreciate it if you would look into the situation and let me know if you can contact them and whether I should start looking for a new ISP.

Bern Easterford

Sadly, Bern, this ISP has followed a long line of unmetered ISPs that have gone out of business. The service originally offered unmetered access for just £25/year but had raised its price to £12.95/month during its final days. Leicester Trading Standards says anyone who is owed money should contact the receivers at Elwell Watchorn & Saxton, 109 Swan Street, Leicester, LE12 7NN.

Ear ache from the wife!

I have just spent half an hour on what I think could easily be the worst site on the Web. I'm talking about

WEB WATCHDOG

BEWARE OF THE DOG!

Freemans.com, the big name in catalogues.

The site is so slow you could almost make the clothes in the time it takes to change pages. The goods that are on there appear to have been selected simply because they are the most expensive. My wife simply wanted a couple of pairs of trousers that had caught her eye in their catalogue, which encouraged her to visit the site and buy online.

My wife has never been a great fan of the Net so imagine my disappointment when she sat down and logged on to the site, only to find it is so poor. This experience had led to me getting a fair bit of ear ache – I've always enthused to her about how good the Net is!

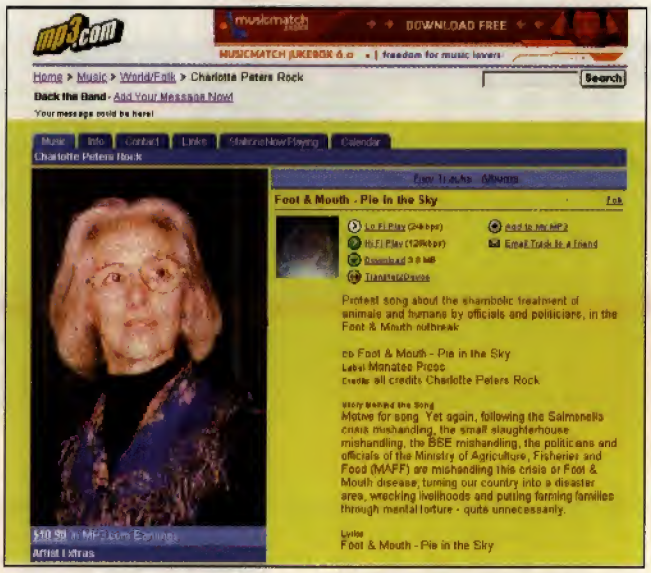
Please warn the rest of my fellow *Practical Internet* readers about avoiding this site until they get a decent Web design company to sort it out.

David Patterson

Web Watchdog growled at Nichole Herbert, head of eCommerce at Freemans.com, who replied: "On the date that Mr Patterson was accessing Freemans.com, we did have some severe connectivity issues which we hope are now resolved. This may be the reason for his issue with the site.

"I regret that Mr Patterson and his wife had such a bad experience online. If they were struggling for whatever reason, we have a 24-hour customer hotline where the customer advisor could have taken the order or guided them through the site. I am surprised that Mr and Mrs Patterson couldn't find the trousers they were looking for as we have a new search facility online where his wife could have just entered the item number from the catalogue. As for presenting the most expensive items within each section we show the best sellers – these are what the customers are buying in the range not us trying to 'sell' certain items."

They may not be beaten in fashion, but the Patterson's certainly think other sites beat Freemans for speed!



Use your foot and mouth to jig and jive to Charlotte's song

about the current Foot and Mouth crisis in England? Without the use of MP3 and the Internet, I couldn't spread it anywhere near as quickly or efficiently as I have.

It can be downloaded free of charge from **http://artists.mp3s.com/artist_song/1455/1455689.html.**

It has already been awarded the title of 'MP3 folk song of the week' at About.com.

Charlotte Peters Rock

A truly moo-ving song, Charlotte. Thanks for that.

Vanishing into (Web) space

I've noticed over the past six months that free Web servers like FortuneCity are starting to delete Web sites because of the loss of revenue from banner advertising and the dot com downturn.

Do you think this is the beginning of a downward trend? A good free host I've found is 50 Megs (**www.50megs.com**) but it only allows you 1Gb of bandwidth per month.

They do give you the choice of paying to remove the banner ads, though, and extra bandwidth up to 10Gb a month. You can also change the name severs which is handy as it's better than forwarding. I think they are the only free service to allow this.

Richard SS

Unfortunately many free Web hosting services are indeed either shutting down or asking users to pay as they feel the financial pinch. One alternative is to sign up to a free ISP such as LineOne

FREE NET LEGAL ADVICE

LEGAL AID

RICHARD COHEN, CO-FOUNDER OF THE DESKTOP LAWYER (**WWW.DESKTOPLAWYER.NET**), ANSWERS YOUR INTERNET LEGAL QUESTIONS FOR FREE

Email us at watchdog@paragon.co.uk with the subject 'Legal Aid' and we will forward your question on to Richard

Sex shocker

It seems that the only way to earn money on the Internet is by setting up an adult site. That's why I'm considering launching my own. I wouldn't be offering any explicit material, just glamour pictures.

I've already bought an excellent URL and a friend suggested I sign up with a US Web hosting company to avoid any UK legal issues. Would this put me in the clear legally?

Mike Lamb

SINCE YOU WILL be uploading content from the United Kingdom for downloading in the United Kingdom, you are obliged to observe the obscenity laws. The law prohibits you from displaying material likely to deprave and corrupt. It makes no difference where you're hosted.

If you are hosted in the US and you are recording details of your users, you will be exporting their personal information outside the EU. The eighth principle of data protection requires you to have an adequate level of protection for the rights and freedoms of those you hold information. Before you enter a commitment, you must ensure that there's a 'safe harbour agreement'.

Since you will be selling into the UK, you will be obliged to observe the Distance Selling Regulations. The Regulations set out very specific requirements and include a need to give a cooling off period. It may be possible to avoid the need to give a cooling off period where a service has begun by agreement.

In selecting pictures and text, you must avoid infringing other peoples' copyright. It can be a criminal offence where there is an intention to profit.

(www.lineone.net) and use the free Web space that comes with its accounts. See our tutorial on pages 74-75 of this issue for more.

Get on your bike...

Through your letters pages, *Practical Internet* has been asking Web site-owning readers to share the time that it's taken to get listed on search engines. There have been some pretty speedy submissions so far, but I think our story rivals them all.

We launched our online bicycle shop (www.bicyclenet.co.uk) in November 1999. I recall it was a Saturday and that we had finally prepared our catalogue software. So we uploaded, not anticipating any response from our site for at least a week or two. Imagine our surprise when – within the hour – we downloaded our very first order. This turned out to be a chap who was looking for a bike for his son as a birthday present.

With this we thought we would have hundreds of orders per day. Yet it was a couple of days before the next ones started to appear – and our expectations accordingly reset!

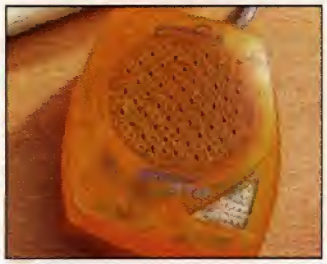
Peter Burton

Now that's impressive, Peter. Pedal power wins the day!

Never miss phone calls

Recently, you had a query from reader M Doyle (Backchat, *Practical Internet* issue 53) about a little gadget that plugs into your modem and phone line to alert you when an incoming call arrives.

The product you referred to – Online Call Manager – may work okay, but there is a better gadget called Internet Alert that can be found in Innovations catalogues (amongst others).



This little gizmo works using BT's Call Minder and costs £29. When a call comes in, it beeps and flashes a light for 15 seconds. You may then pick up the phone – at which point the modem is disabled – or you can ignore the call and carry on browsing then use Call Minder in the normal way. It's on sale at GUS (www.gus.co.uk).

Malcolm Langley

Good advice, Malcolm. Thanks for reminding us about this product which was tested in *Practical Internet* issue 46 (October 2000).

Attachment of the month

Britain's cows have been in the news a lot lately and going by this email attachment which is currently doing the rounds, it's time to give the bovines a break! Thanks to Lisa Jenkins of Manchester for sending it in.

Received a quirky or funny email attachment? Send it to pi@paragon.co.uk with the subject 'Attachment of the month' and we'll feature it here

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Instant enlightenment!

Instant messaging is used by millions of Web users every day to stay in touch with family and friends. **James Thornton** discovers why it's become such a huge online phenomenon

All the software mentioned in this feature is on this month's Practical Internet CD.

Nattering on the Net has undergone something of a revolution over the last few years. Riding on the back of the popular email and online chat services, Instant Messaging (IM) has blossomed into the easiest way for people to engage in a tête-à-tête on their PC.

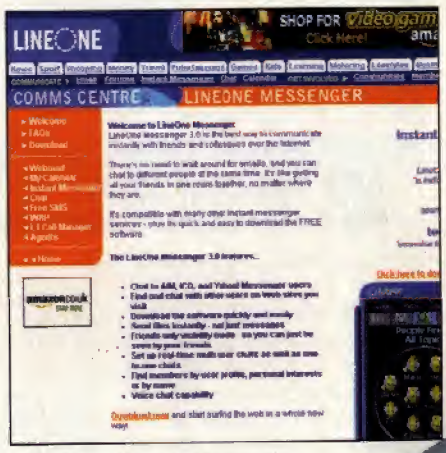
Early services such as ICQ pioneered a form of real-time text messaging that allowed people to communicate instantly with anyone in the world without running up monstrous phone bills on long distance calls. Recently, the popularity of services such as the AOL and MSN instant messengers has spawned a whole gamut of programs. Most of the services work on the same principle. You first install the software, then chose a unique username and password to initialise the messenger. The program will then make itself comfortable on your desktop and will proceed to load itself up every time you switch on your machine. Names of friends can then be added to a personal database, or 'buddy list' as it is often branded in IM lingo. After this, you can find out whenever any of these buddies are online and start exchanging some chit chat with them.

Count the pennies

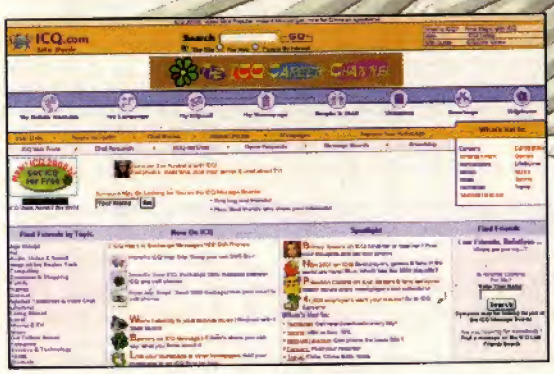
There is no doubt that instant messengers are a great way to speak to people. They are

cheaper than phone calls, quicker than emails and more private than Internet chat services. However, it's always important for you to chose the right one as despite the best efforts of some of the providers, there is currently little integration between the various services. This means that if you sign up to AOL Instant Messenger, for example, you will not be able to send messages to friends who are with MSN or ICQ. Because of this, probably the best reason for plumping for a certain messenger is if you know a lot of people who use the same one.

While all the messengers give you the same basic instant communication fix, they vary in style and in the extra features that they offer. We've had a look at the four most popular instant messengers to give you the low-down on how they shape up. You can then check them out for yourself along with four other great free instant messengers on this month's cover CD. Pick the one that suits you and start messaging!



LineOne's Instant Messenger lets you take part in real-time group chats as well as one on one conversations

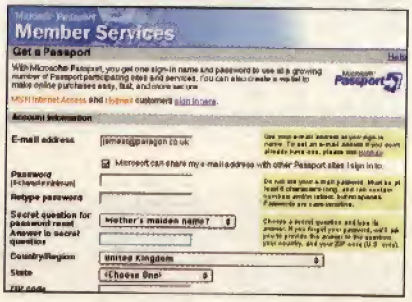


ICQ, or 'I seek you', was one of the first services to provide live messaging facilities

MSN Messenger

NEVER ONE TO miss out on the latest Web trends, Microsoft launched its messaging service in an effort to keep up with AOL and ICQ, and since then has seen the number of users rocket to dizzying levels.

The service is free but you must have an MSN Passport or Hotmail account before you can sign up for it. Once installed, the program will sit in the bottom right-hand corner of your desktop and will open itself every time you log onto your machine, letting you know which of your pals are online.



The service is very simple to pick up and contains several functions to make your conversations flow smoothly. For starters, there's a typing indicator which lets you know when your friend is writing a message, meaning you'll never interrupt each other or cut someone off in their prime. MSN Messenger features rich customisation, allowing you to spruce up your messages by changing the font size, colours or adding sounds and emoticons. These tiny images can be used to add a personal touch and can convey anything from a thumbs-up to a kiss.

Instant exchange

While the service may not look as slick as its counterparts, it does boast the unique ability to give you instant notification of email in your Hotmail account. Because of this, and its close integration with Outlook Express, MSN Messenger is great for keeping your finger on the pulse of your incoming communications.

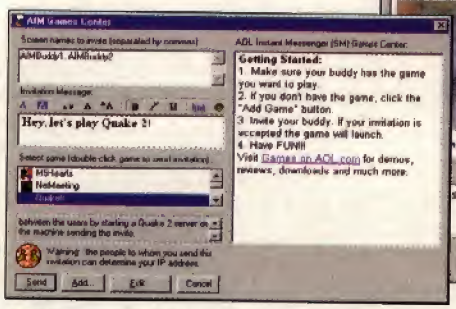
If you are a popular character then it's quite likely that you'll experience one of the Messenger's weak points. There is no function for organising your buddy list into folders so it can get tricky to manage a huge list of contacts. Also, the service only facilitates up to five people talking at a time. Having said this though, MSN Messenger stands up well as a simple utility for keeping in touch, even if it lacks some of the visual flair and features of other messaging services.

MSN's three steps to instant messaging heaven means you can be chatting with online friends within minutes of signing up

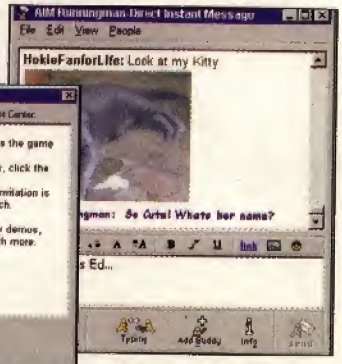
AOL Instant Messenger (AIM)

AOL BOASTS OVER 85 million users of its messaging service and part of the reason for this must go down to its ease of use. Once you have installed the software, it's simply a case of choosing a screen name (or your AOL username) and entering your email address. When installed, you can set AIM to load up every time you switch on your machine.

There is much more to the message service than just exchanging witty remarks with friends. AIM is packed with lots of useful add-ons such as a news ticker which flashes up all the latest headlines and showbiz gossip while you're signed on. The service also features a voice chat facility where you can hook up a microphone and talk to your online buddies. The sound quality is excellent and allows several people to enter into a tele-conference style discussion. Organising your contacts is made easy thanks to AIM's 'Buddy list' which lets you arrange screen names into folders based on categories such as friends, family or co-workers. You can even add customised icons to chums' names so that when they sign in you know exactly who is online. Once chatting you can let people know what sort of mood you're in by choosing one of the many cartoon facial expression icons to send along with your message.



AIM offers users the chance to challenge friends to an online gaming session



AOL's instant messenger contains a handy facility for adding digital images to your messages

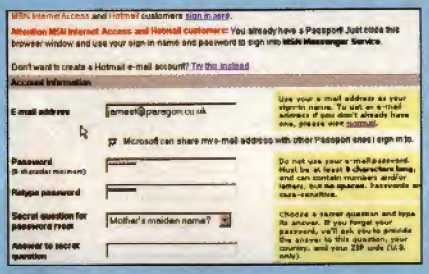
Share and share alike

If you've discovered a tantalising bit of software or want someone to hear your favourite MP3 track, you can take advantage of the file transfer facility which lets you send and receive files, pictures and sounds provided you accept the transfer.

This bonanza of features makes AOL's Instant Messenger a great place to pass the time of day and have fun at the same time.

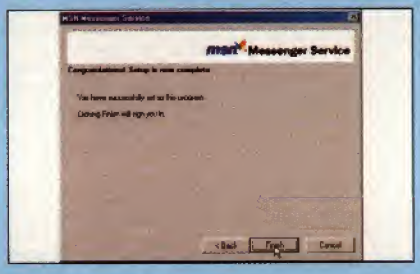
AIM would be the most splendid messenger ever were it not for a couple of minor quirks. Firstly, the facility for adding to your buddy list is very cumbersome. In order to add one of your AIM-using pals to your list you need to know their screen name. If you don't know it then you can end up entering a whole load of information on the service's not-so-magical search wizard just to find them. Another slight annoyance is the fact that you can't send messages to people who are offline.

HOW TO SEND AN INSTANT MESSAGE WITH MSN MESSENGER



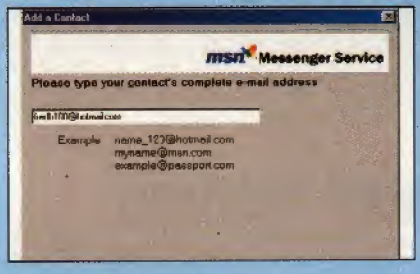
1 Get your passport

If you're not a Hotmail user, you need to sign up for a Microsoft Passport account. Go to **www.passport.com** and click the 'sign up' button and follow the on-screen instructions. You will be issued with a sign-in name and password.



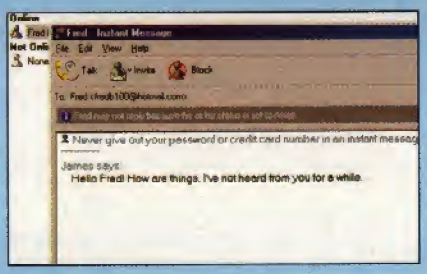
2 Install the software

Install the Messenger software from this month's cover CD. A wizard will appear where you enter your sign-in name, password and then click 'Finish'. Messenger can now be accessed by clicking 'Start' then 'Programs'.



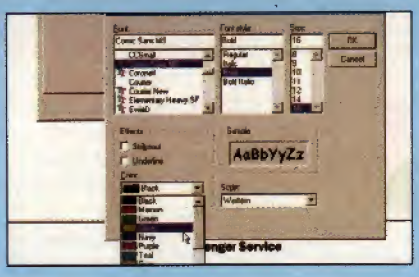
3 Your buddies

The opening screen is where you see your buddies. To add people to your list, click the 'Add' button and then select the 'By E-mail Address Or Sign-In Name' radio button and type the person's Hotmail email address.



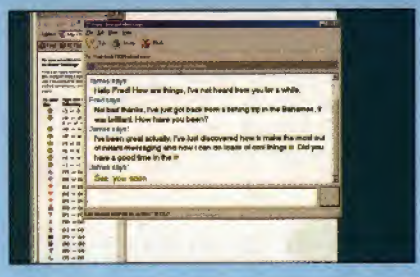
4 Your contact list

If they have an MSN account, Messenger adds your friend to the contact list. To send this person a message, double-click their name from the Contacts List. The Instant Message window will appear. Type in a message and click 'Send'.



5 Extra options

Any response from your buddy will appear in the top part of the window. You can spice up the look of your messages by changing the text, font and colour of your words. Select 'Options' from the Tools menu. Now use the Personal tab.



6 Emote yourself

Emoticons can be added by typing a code in the message window. A list of emoticons and codes is available from the Messenger Help system. Select 'Help' followed by Help Topics and type 'emoticons' in the search box.

ICQ

ICQ (PRONOUNCED 'I SEEK YOU') BILLS itself as the world's largest Internet online community and boasts nearly 100 million users from across the globe. The free instant messaging service is by far the most feature-rich service around and lets you do much more than simply exchanging quick messages. It allows you to transfer files, play online games with friends, and even make voice calls to any phone or PC around the world from your computer. An advantage ICQ has over other instant messengers is the fact that you can post messages to people even if they're offline at the time. The message is simply delivered to your friend's ICQ mailbox to wait for them when they do go online.

ICQ comes with a global search directory to help you track down your chums

Global friends

If you only have a few online companions, the service is brilliant for making new friends because of the huge number of users. Another boon is its 'Whitepages' directory, which allows you to search a database of other ICQ users and find people with similar interests to you. Once you've found these kindred spirits, you can then add them to your contact list. While this is a great way to meet people, the chances are you will eventually experience the curse of spamming or nuisance messages, in which case you can use ICQ's authorisation function. By turning authorisation on, people have to get permission to speak to you. Another useful feature is the ability to change your online status if you are busy, away from your desk or simply don't want anyone to find out that you're online.

The ICQ contact list provides an easy to read summary of whose online

With other options such as message archiving, a reminder function and the ability to send instant SMS scrawlings, the service can become a highly developed communications tool once you have mastered all the functions. The only drawback to this abundance of extras is the fact that once installed, the program does tend to gobble up memory and as a result can sometimes affect the speed of your machine.

Yahoo! Messenger

THE YAHOO! MESSENGER'S graphical interface is perhaps the most easy on the eye, as it features a unique 'skinning' capability, allowing you to customise your messaging utility with fancy pictures and background colours. Couple this with the status icons, which tell you at a glance whether your buddies are on or offline, and you have a chatting tool which is simple and pleasant to use.

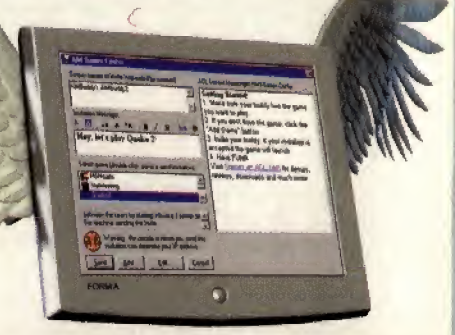
As you might expect, Yahoo! has been careful to integrate the messenger with its other Web services. As a result, users who have an email account with the company are prompted with an audio alert and an on-screen announcement whenever an email is received. The program also features close integration with Yahoo!'s Chat service for easy access to people who frequent the chat site.

Subscribers to Yahoo!'s email service can sign up to the messenger to receive instant mail alerts

Hands-free chat

The latest version of the Messenger boasts a voice chat function which supports handsfree chatettes and is full duplex, meaning you can talk and listen at the same time (see our Yahoo! voice chatting tutorial on pages 64-65 to find out how). Other good little features include the ability to minimise incoming messages. This is handy for situations where you are not able to talk straight away (at the office, for example) and you can simple maximise them from the taskbar when you're ready. You can also set the messenger to keep you up-to-date with the latest stock prices, news and sports results as they happen. All of these can be tailor-made to suit your interests using the program's Preferences menu.

Overall, the Yahoo! Messenger is a great looking and easy to manage program which is perfect if you already use Yahoo!'s email and chat services. However, as the service is not as popular as the AOL, ICQ and MSN services, you may well find that few of your comrades are using the service at present, meaning you may find yourself talking into a black hole. It also doesn't quite have the repertoire of features that the other three instant messengers enjoy.



TOP INSTANT MESSENGERS HEAD-TO-HEAD (ALL ON THE CD)

	VOICE CHAT	EMAIL ALERTS	FILE TRANSFER	OFFLINE MESSAGING	NEWS SERVICE
AOL Instant Messenger	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
MSN Messenger	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
ICQ	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Yahoo! Messenger	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Sonork	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Go2Net Communicator	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
LineOne Messenger	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Screen Fire	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

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MUST-HAVE SOFTWARE

on the CD

You can find all of these programs on this month's cover CD

If you're thinking of shelling out for software, read this before dipping into your wallet. **Mark Newman** and **Nick Sweeney** have compiled the ultimate collection of world-beating free Internet programs, all of which are on the free CD-ROM

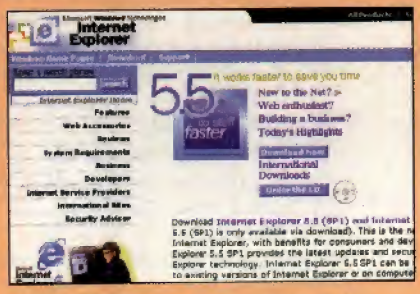
Some people say that you don't get something for nothing. Well, those people haven't been online recently. Across the Web, people are happily giving away software and services. You might ask why anyone spends time writing a useful program, then gives it away?

Well, coders are the DIY experts of the digital world: they enjoy solving problems, and resent paying for pre-built tools. Often, authors are just glad to have created something that works, and derive a sense of pride when happy users email back their thanks. There are other reasons why programs become freeware. When Microsoft released Internet Explorer, it was a classic 'loss-leader' to grab market share from Netscape. It worked. Then there's 'abandonware', when a company stops supporting a commercial product and releases it into the public domain. Finally, a recent trend is for 'shareware' software to become 'adware', giving you the choice of viewing ad banners, or stumping up the registration fee for a commercial-free interface.

So here's a pick of the best free software and tools for Net users and Web builders: give them a try, and see whether they make a difference to your online experience. All of the programs we look at are on this month's cover CD, so you really have nothing to lose.

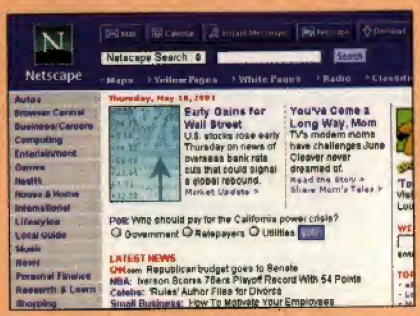
BOOST YOUR BROWSER!

WHEN MOST PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE NET, WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN IS THE WEB. YOU NEED BROWSERS TO VIEW THE WEB, AND THE MAIN ONES ARE, OF COURSE, FREEWARE: BUT SO ARE MANY OF THE PLUG-INS AND ADD-ONS WHICH MAKE BROWSING QUICKER AND EASIER



1 INTERNET EXPLORER 5.01 (www.microsoft.com/ie)

By making its Web browser freeware and bundling it with Windows, Microsoft took the first step towards winning the browser war over Netscape. Now approaching version 6.0, you don't need us to tell you about it: a fast, standards-compliant browser that's guaranteed to be the one program pre-installed on every new PC.



2 NETSCAPE NAVIGATOR 6.0 (www.mozilla.org/download)

Netscape may have lost the browser wars, but its new version represents a return to form – even if some users are not happy with the stability of it. You can grab the official version 6.0 from this month's CD, complete with AOL Instant Messenger, Communicator email and other commercial add-ons.

3 OPERA 5.02 (www.opera.com)

Whereas IE and Netscape are big, memory-hogging programs, Opera runs in a few megabytes. It's currently the most standards-compliant browser, with extensive keyboard shortcuts, and mouse-gesture navigation. It includes an email client and instant messenger, and remembers all of your personal details.

4 NEOPLANET 5.2 (www.neoplanet.com)

NeoPlanet gives your browser a facelift, and a high-intensity workout. To begin with, it looks great: there are dozens of skins to choose from, or you can design your own. But it's more than a pretty face, there's also an integrated chat client, instant messenger and bookmark index. And as it uses the Internet Explorer browser engine, your Web experience won't suffer.

5 POWERMARKS 3.5 (www.powermarks.com)

PowerMarks aims to put an end to the chore of synchronising and reorganising your Netscape Bookmarks and IE Favorites. It imports all the links you've stored into a single database that's easy to search. You can also get it to track your online activity and create ready-made bookmarks for the sites you visit on a regular basis.

6 ACCELERATOR PLUS 4.3 (www.speedbit.com)

Accelerator Plus's makers humbly claim their software is "the world's leading download acceleration software." And we think they're probably right. It can be fully integrated into your browser to boost download speeds by up to 300%. It works by finding your closest servers and supports multi-server downloads and error correction.

7 ATOMICA (www.atomica.com)

The Atomica toolbar gives your browser the power of an encyclopaedia: select a word or phrase and you'll get a definition, other relevant information, and a list of links to related sites. It's simple to use, doesn't clutter your screen while browsing, and it actually works. A great add-on.

8 QUICKNEWS BAR 1.0 (www.free2net.com/adnetwork/quicknews/)

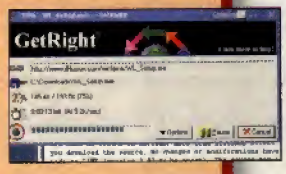
QuickNews Bar serves continuously updated and personalized news headlines to your desktop. It floats on top of your screen – allowing you to move it or hide it whenever you want. You can choose from 23 news categories. Neat.

9 NAVISCOPE (www.naviscope.com)

Naviscope streamlines your Net connection and turbo-charges your browser. It uses a pre-emptive cache to save time looking up Net addresses, and gets around the bottlenecks in the Web transfer protocol by retrieving your pages in small pieces, then reassembling them on your desktop.

10 GETRIGHT (www.getright.com)

The best of the download managers, GetRight is now supported by advertising, so you won't be nagged to register unless you can't cope with banners while you wait for files to arrive. We've talked about it plenty of times before: It searches for fast mirror sites, allows you to pause and resume downloads, and even queue them for retrieval while you're tucked up in bed.



POWER UP YOUR NET CONNECTION

THESE PROGRAMS HANDLE THE NITTY-GRITTY OF YOUR SYSTEM AND ITS NETWORK. THEY ADD FUNCTIONALITY, TWEAK SETTINGS TO OPTIMISE YOUR CONNECTION, AND MAKE THE MOST OF THE NETWORKED SERVICES AVAILABLE TO ANYONE WHO GOES ONLINE

11 POWER ARCHIVER (www.powerarchiver.com)

If you're downloading files from the Net, you'll soon come across compressed archives. While the most popular uncompressors such as WinZip are unrestricted shareware, you can avoid the guilt at not registering by installing Power Archiver, which has a similar feature set, handles all major compression formats, and is almost identical in its look and feel.

12 EASYMTU (http://members.tripod.com/~EasyMTU/easymtu)

Some of the default Network settings on some versions of Windows are designed for high-speed local Networks, not dial-up connections. If left untuned, you run the risk of creating bottlenecks. EasyMTU can make the tweaks for you. It's simple, it does the job, it's free.

13 NEOTRACE (www.neotrace.com)

NeoTrace plots the transmission of data packets over the Net through a world map. If you are experiencing a slow connection, use this program and then complain to your ISP if your email is being re-routed through Hawaii.

14 DIMENSION 4 (www.thinkman.com/dimension4)

Time servers are among the Net's best kept secrets: a group of interconnected computers with the sole purpose of keeping the right time. There are plenty of free applications which synchronise your PC's clock with a nearby server, but this is one of the best.

15 LEECHFTP (http://stud.fh-heilbronn.de/~jdebis/leechftp)

If you're just downloading files from FTP sites, a browser will do the job. But for more complicated tasks, such as mirroring a directory or uploading pages to your site, it's not quite smart enough. Of all the free FTP clients around, we like this one the best: it's solid, has a clean interface and provides all the features you need, in less than a megabyte.

16 AVG ANTIVIRUS 6.0 (www.grisoft.com)

Most anti-virus programs justify their cost by providing free automatic updates, so you're always protected against the latest threats. Amazingly, Grisoft not only provides its scanner free for personal use: it also offers the updates for nothing.

17 ZONEALARM (www.zonealarm.com)

If you've gone broadband with ADSL or a cablemodem, remember that a permanently-connected PC can be a sitting target for hackers, crackers and script kiddies. So think about security: ZoneAlarm's basic edition sets up a firewall that shields your machine from unwanted intrusions, and lets you know who's trying to get in.

18 X CLEANER (www.xblock.com)

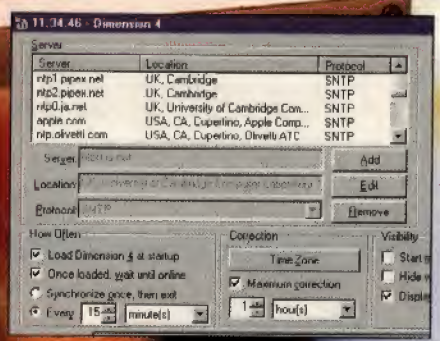
This super little program remove traces of documents opened and pictures viewed on your Web browser. It can detect 'spy' software that logs your activity and internet tracks. It also lets you permanently delete the digital foot prints left behind when you browse the Web and also erase potentially embarrassing 'hidden' files!

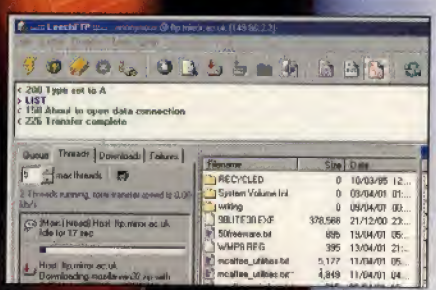
19 CYBERKIT 2.5 (www.cyberkit.Net)

CyberKit combines all the best-known Net analysis tools in a single program. You can send pings to check whether servers are alive, and see traceroutes as your data passes from computer to computer on the Net. There are also tools to look up domain names and Net addresses, and to 'finger' individual users for the personal data they share online.

20 HTTRACK (www.httrack.com)

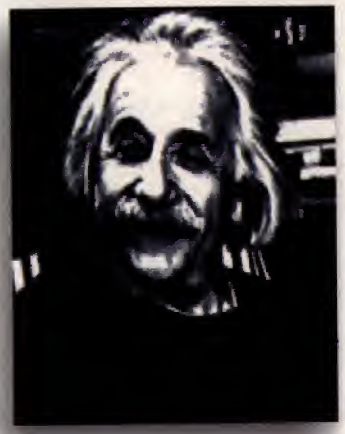
While the major browsers offer you the ability to 'work offline', they're not particularly suited to storing entire sites on your hard drive. A dedicated offline browser handles the job much better. HTTrack is among the best, allowing you to store the pages you retrieve in logical, easy to navigate 'projects'.





Dimension 4 (top) is an excellent time server and LeechFTP lets you upload Web pages to the Net

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to get the most out of the internet



"...if only i'd thought of this yesterday....i'd be a .com millionaire..he he"

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KEEP IN TOU

ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR ACTIVITIES ON THE NET IS COMMUNICATION. WHETHER IT'S EMAIL OR CHAT YOU'RE INTO, THESE PROGRAMS MAKE KEEPING IN CONTACT THAT BIT EASIER

21 OUTLOOK EXPRESS (www.microsoft.com/outlookexpress)
Outlook Express is not just a free program, it's a ubiquitous program. In fact, Outlook was the first email client to be made free for popular consumption. It doesn't have the most features, and some of its formatting quirks may enrage old-timers, but it's easy to use, and handles any attachment you throw at it (including, alas, viruses). With this program installed on your PC, you can concentrate on sending messages, not fiddling with settings.

22 EUDORA 5 (www.eudora.com)
Long before Outlook Express, there was a mail program called Eudora for the Mac which cost money. It's now ad-supported freeware, runs on Windows, and is ideal for email junkies, combining powerful message filters and customisable stationery and personalities. The newest version even warns you if your mail is likely to offend!

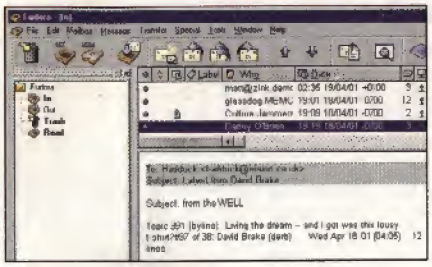
SOUND AND

THERE'S TONS OF FREE ONLINE CONTENT TO BE VIEWED, LISTENED TO, AND PLAYED WITH: SO IT'S A GOOD JOB THAT THE PROGRAMS WHICH PLAY THEM ARE FREE AS WELL

31 REALPLAYER 8 (www.real.com)
RealNetworks started something of a revolution in Net-based audio, making it possible to hear live streams for the first time. The basic version does everything fine, without the frills. And while Microsoft's home-grown player offers heavy competition, RealPlayer is still an essential element of every browser's toolkit.

32 REALSERVER BASIC (www.realNetworks.com/products/basicserver/info.html)
If you're not content with just listening to streamed audio over the Web, why not try creating some of your own? RealNetworks offers a free, stripped-down version of its audio server for home users,

CH WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY



23 SPAM BUSTER 1.9 (www.contactplus.com)
Run Spam Buster before your email program as the first line of defence against junk. Spam Buster compares the email message, header information, sender, and size to the spam settings you've defined.

24 ICQ (www.icq.com)
There are more popular instant messengers, but ICQ was the first. This latest incarnation allows you to run chatrooms and videoconferences, send SMS messages and make Internet phone calls.

25 MSN MESSENGER (messenger.msn.com)
If ICQ is the big daddy of instant messengers, MSN is the nimble young cousin. As well as offering all the typical features of IM clients, it hooks up to the Microsoft Passport Network, so there's seamless access to Hotmail and NetMeeting without ever leaving the client.

26 AOL INSTANT MESSENGER (www.aol.com)
This hugely popular program allows Net users to communicate via private, personalized text messages, and indicates when friends, family members, and business colleagues are online. It combines AOL's popular Buddy List and Instant Message features.

27 INOCULATEIT (http://antivirus.cai.com/)
InoculateIT Personal Edition is a superb free antivirus program for your desktop which automatically detects and cleans conventional file and boot sector viruses as well as macro viruses that infect Office Word documents, Excel spreadsheets and Access databases.

28 FREEAGENT 1.21 (www.forteinc.com/agent/)
If you're a hardcore news reader, then you need a hardcore newsreader. Forte's FreeAgent, a scaled-down client that's designed for personal use, provides powerful sampling, threading and filtering,

29 NETMEETING 3.0 (www.microsoft.com/windows/Netmeeting)
Videoconferencing was once confined to the city boardroom but NetMeeting puts it into the home. Bundled with Internet Explorer, it combines standard conferencing features, such as video links and chat, with the ability for users to share files and work.

30 EGENIE (http://egenie.wibble.org.uk)
A lot of sites offer a free SMS message service, but eGenie goes further, putting that capability into a free desktop application which hooks into your Outlook Express address book.

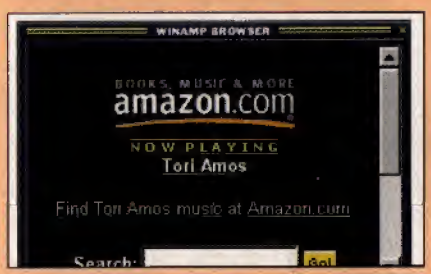
VISION STREAMING ONTO YOUR PC

which converts desktop sound files into the Real format, so they can be broadcast across the Net to anyone with a suitable player.

33 WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER 7 (www.microsoft.com)
The latest incarnation of Windows Media Player is a multimedia powerhouse, which catalogues your MP3s, tunes into streaming radio, and provides snazzy visual effects to accompany your tunes.

34 WINAMP (www.winamp.com)
Winamp plays MPEG Layer 2 (MP2) and Layer 3 (MP3) audio streams and combines extensive functionality with an intuitive interface. It has a full-featured playlist editor and a ten band graphic equalizer with user-definable presets that can automatically load specific files.

35 SONIQUE 1.51 (www.sonique.com)
Sonique is an impressive audio player capable of handling MP3 files, Microsoft Windows Media files, audio CDs, and more. It features a dynamic, windowless interface, complete with fully animated menu systems. There's also a full-featured playlist editor.



36 FLASH PLAYER (www.macromedia.com/flash/shockwave)
More and more Web sites use Macromedia's Flash to deliver high quality animation and multimedia, so it's well worth grabbing the player. You can install it as a browser plug-in, upgrade through the Windows Update facility, or just grab the latest version from the Macromedia site.

37 SHOCKWAVE PLAYER (www.macromedia.com/shockwave/download)
Shockwave is Flash's big brother: a fully-featured multimedia toolkit, used to create CD-ROMs, presentations and other rich media. Many online games use Shockwave rather than Flash because of its flexibility. This does mean a bigger plug-in and player, but it's definitely worth it.

38 WINMX (www.winmx.com)
We won't go into the ethics of online file sharing: but if you're looking for the best way to go about it, then WinMX is a good choice. It's a freeware clone of Napster with more powerful search and filtering capabilities, which also hooks into the many unofficial 'OpenNap' servers scattered across the Net.

39 AUDIO GRABBER (www.audiograbber.com)
Audiograbber lets you copy music from a CD-ROM drive digitally, rather than using the analogue method that first pipes the audio through the sound card. This digital recording process enables you to make high-quality copies of the original music. A must for music fans everywhere.

40 ALL SOUND 2000 (www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Sector/7979/)
AllSound is an audio player for MP2, MP3, audio CD, WAV and MIDI files. Files can be loaded into a playlist separately or as a group of favourites.

BUILD A BETTER WEB SITE TODAY

YOU CAN PUT TOGETHER A DECENT SITE WITH NOTEPAD, BUT BOTHER WHEN YOU'VE GOT PLENTY OF FREEWARE APPS DESIGNED TO TAKE THE HASSLE OUT OF HTML, AND ADD A TOUCH OF PANACHE TO YOUR PAGE?

41 ARACHNOPHILIA (www.arachnoid.com/arachnophilia)

There's a saying that real Web programmers use Notepad. We promise you, this isn't true. And while there are plenty of pricey HTML editors, there's also Arachnophilia. It provides everything you need to build a decent site and all the author asks in return is that you be nice.

42 1ST PAGE 2000 2.0 (www.evrsoft.com)

1st Page 2000 is a HTML/script authoring tool for professional and blooming Webmasters. It comes with an impressive interface and a mixture of all the best features from several top-name HTML editors. It's amazing that this is free.

43 HTML KIT (www.chami.com/html-kit/)

This is a full-featured text editor designed to help HTML, XML and script authors to edit, format, validate, preview and publish Web pages. Newcomers to HTML coding can benefit from the program's error-catching abilities. Experts can save time spent on common tasks, using the customizable and extendible editor, while maintaining full control over the code.

44 COFFEE CUP FREE HTML (www.coffeecup.com)

CoffeeCup Free HTML, formerly CoffeeCup HTML Express, is a streamlined editor designed to make Web site building a breeze, even for the novice with little experience. It comes with free templates, background images and buttons.

45 E-QUILL (www.equill.com)

E-Quill is a tool that streamlines and automates the manual process of designing, reviewing, approving and maintaining Web sites. EQuill Markup Client allows you to mark up, highlight, edit, and post notes to Web pages or documents directly through your browser. E-Quill is free and unrestricted. Dead clever this one.

46 TRUETECH WEBCAM 2.2 (www.truetech.com/webcam/freeware.html)

Webcams are an increasingly popular way for site builders to give visitors an idea of their life. But you don't have to go through the fiddly process of creating snapshots manually: TrueTech's little application does it for you, adding captions and visual effects to the camera's images, then uploading them automatically to your Web server whenever you go online.

47 COLTOHEX (www.andy-jones.com/coltohex.html)

It's a thankless task to work out the codes for the colours you want on your site. This application lets you pick the colour you want from the Windows palette, and converts it into the necessary hex value. You can also test combinations of text and background colour, to avoid eyestrain!

48 GIFCLEAN32 (http://dsbnj.tripod.com/mapmaker.html)

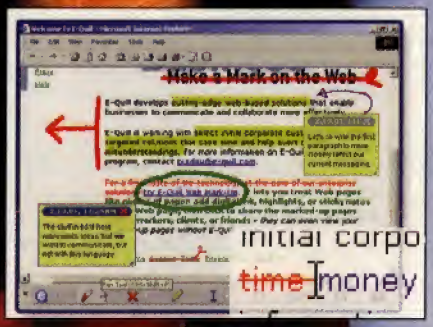
GifClean32 removes unneeded structures from GIF image files, making them cleaner and leaner. Specifically, GifClean32 erases comments and extraneous data. It's especially effective at reducing the size of animated GIF files – helping them to load faster when used on your Web pages and keep your site's visitors happy. An important piece of software to use.

49 SITE UP METABUILDER (www.siteup.com/meta.html)

A set of well-chosen META tags can mean the difference between your site sitting pretty at the top of the search rankings, or languishing among the also-rans where no-one will ever see it. This free tag builder generates HTML that can be copied to the clipboard and pasted straight into the top of your pages, giving search engines enough information to help them stand out from the crowd.

50 PUTTY (www.chiark.greenend.org.uk/~sgtatham/putty)

Telnet still remains an important part of site development, allowing you to log into remote machines. The Telnet program provided with Windows isn't really up to the job, so replace it with PuTTY: a freeware client that also supports secure encrypted logins through the SSH protocol.



CoffeeCup HTML Editor (top) lets you create colourful Web pages in minutes, while E-Quill lets you streamline the design process

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Barclays EPDQ Hosting Partner · e-Commerce solutions from £19.95/mo. · Free Frontpage 2000 Extensions · More on-line at www.9netave.uk.net

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9NETAVENUE

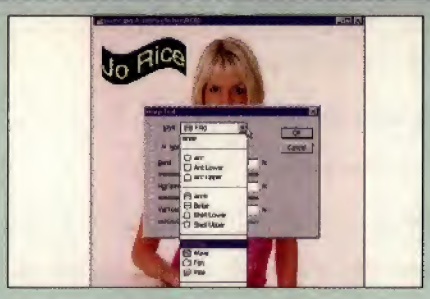
Program: Photoshop Elements
Company: Adobe
URL: www.adobe.co.uk
Type of program: Graphics application
File size: 130Mb of hard drive space
Cost: £79
Contact: www.adobe.co.uk

Photoshop for £79? Surely some mistake? Clive Parker reviews the new low-cost version of the top graphics suite

Practical internet BEST BUY ★★★★★

PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS

WHAT'S NEW

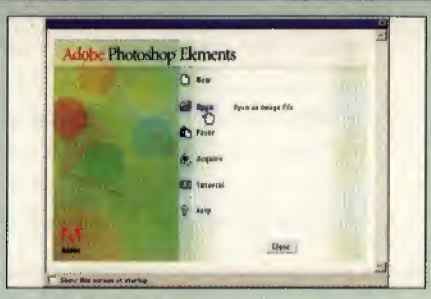


Type and text effects

Type control in Photoshop Elements is excellent. Not only can you type your text directly onto the image, you can also apply a series of effects to the type such as arcs, waves and other shapes. You can also modify type using the Free Transform tools.

Recipes palette

By using the Recipes palette in Elements, you can perform complex actions on an image in step-by-step increments, follow what's happening along the way. You can also make changes during the process, maintaining complete control over your image.



QuickStart Window

The QuickStart tool lets you instantly begin a project or start work on an image by selecting one of the options in the menu. You can start a new file, open an existing image or paste an image into a new file from the clipboard.

1 Toolbar
This is where you will find all of the drawing tools in Photoshop Elements. Select a tool in the Toolbar and most of its functions are available in the Options bar.

2 Options Bar
The Options Bar gives you complete control over any tool you have selected in the Toolbar. It's context sensitive so it changes as you select different tools.

3 Work area
This is where your images can be worked on.

4 Palette Dock
To save your palettes filling up all of the work area you can dock them at the top of the screen and click on a palette's tab to open it.

5 Open Palette
An example of a docked palette open for use, you can drag and drop effects from the palette directly onto the image you are working on.

6 Open Palettes
If you prefer your palettes in the work area you can drag and drop them from the Palette Dock.

Many home users who dabble in graphics using budget or shareware graphics software would love to be able to use the professional program of choice, Adobe's Photoshop. However, a professional design tool comes with a professional price tag of about £500 including VAT, which is beyond the reach of most home users. But as digital photography becomes more common, there's room in the market for a professional quality imaging application at a reasonable price. That's where Photoshop Elements comes in.

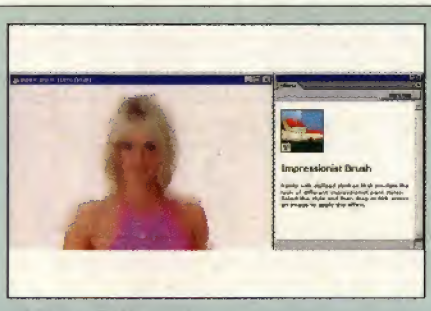
It's not a repackaged or rebranded Photoshop LE (limited edition) – it's a fully developed application in its own right. While Photoshop Elements retains the look, feel and many of the processing capabilities of the full professional version, subtle changes to the interface provide a host of simple to access ready made features and functions designed for digital image manipulation.

People's friend

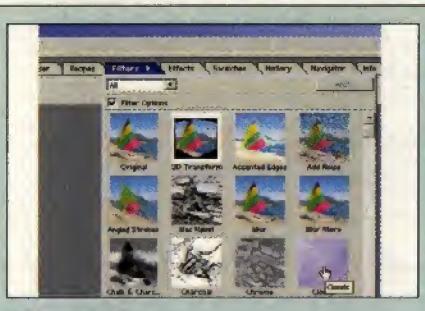
Photoshop Elements is designed for anyone to use, so you don't have to be a professional designer or artist. It's suitable for anyone who's outgrown the functions of Adobe's PhotoDeluxe and can't afford the major upgrade to the full version of Photoshop. And 'by anyone', we mean that Elements is simple enough to be used by photographers, digital camera owners, scanner owners and general graphics hobbyists yet it provides a comprehensive and powerful array of features.

Apply effects such as Lizard Skin to images to create some great results

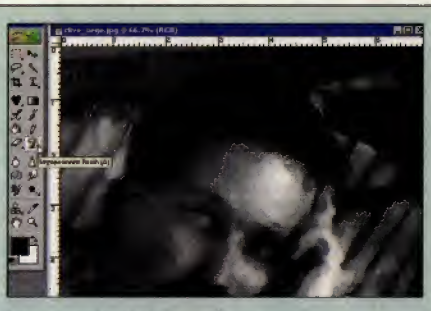
In fact, Photoshop Elements is geared towards the photographic enthusiast – whether the images come from a scanned photograph or from a digital camera – and towards the Web site designer who wants to create great graphics for the Internet. Elements is packed with tools and features that can help you enhance, modify and correct problems with photographs such as the ever popular redeye effect, slanted images from scanners or underexposed or overexposed pictures.



Hints palette
The Hints palette is one way that Adobe has made Photoshop Elements easy to use even for beginners. Every time you select a tool or a palette in the program, a short description of the functions available appears in the Hint's palette window.



Filters palette
Almost all of Photoshop's filters are available in Elements and you can select them from the Filters palette where they are depicted as thumbnail images. To apply a filter to an image, simply drag and drop the filter onto it.



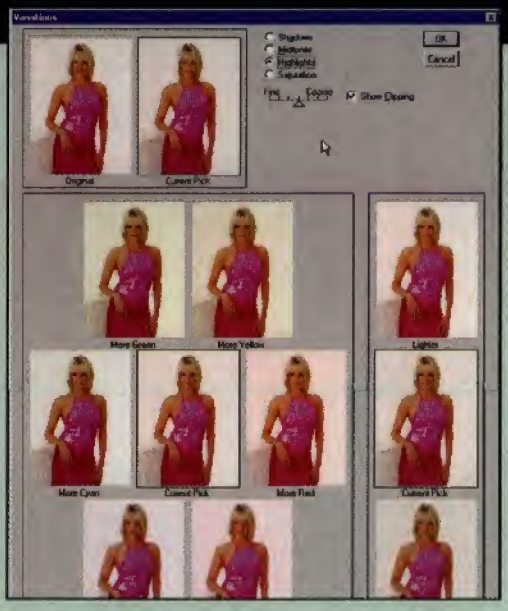
Impressionist brush
Use the new Impressionist brush to apply effects to images that will make them resemble the works of Monet or Renoir. Using different effects and varying brush sizes, you can come up with almost unlimited variations.

DIGITAL IMAGING FEATURES

PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS IS packed with features that make processing and modifying digital images a breeze. You can easily fix common image problems such as under and over exposure and adjust the tone of the image. If you have an image that is overexposed – say a flash is too bright – you can use the Adjust Backlighting command to darken the image. On the other hand if an image is too dark, you can use the Fill Flash command to lighten it. To adjust the tone of specific areas of an image you can use the Dodge command to lighten areas, the Burn command to darken areas and the Sponge tool for changing the colour saturation.

Merging together

Another great tool is Photomerge. This lets you create panoramas by stitching separate images together to create a composite image. All you have to do is select the images to be merged together and let Elements do the rest automatically. You don't even have to tell the program which image goes where, Elements analyses each image and positions it in the correct place. Colour correction is also easily managed in Elements. Using the Variations command generates a series of multiple thumbnail versions of an image using different colour-adjusted versions, you can then choose the one you like best from those on display. Other features include redeye reduction, colour cast correction and the ability to automatically straighten and crop scanned images that are not quite level. These features alone make Photoshop Elements a great imaging tool to add to your PC.



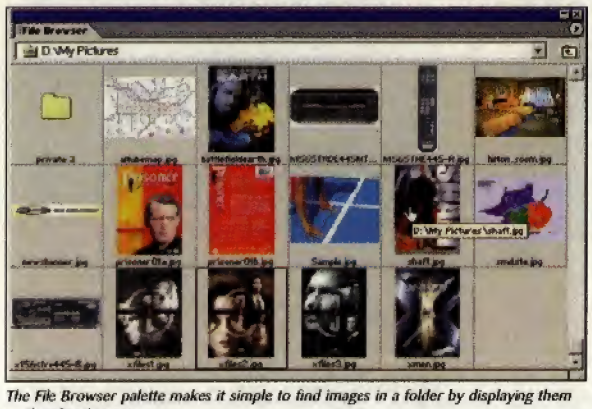
Using the Variations command you can choose which colour adjusted version of an image you prefer

Elements also contains many, er, elements of the full version of Photoshop, but these have been presented in such a manner that they appear less intimidating than a plain text command in a menu would be. Take filters, for example. Both Photoshop 6 and Photoshop Elements come with an impressive array of filters. While Photoshop's filters are presented as a simple text menu with many sub-menus, Photoshop Elements' filters are presented as a palette with visual thumbnail images showing you exactly what effect the filter will have on an image. Of course, Photoshop Elements can undo many levels of work using the History palette as can Photoshop itself, so any filters you do apply to an image can be swiftly undone.

Easy learning curve

The whole program is designed to jump-start less experienced graphics users into using advanced techniques with the minimum effort. When you start the program a QuickStart screen opens that gives you six options. You can create a new blank image, open an existing image, create a new image using any data that may be stored in the clipboard, acquire an image from an attached scanner or digital camera, run one of the many provided tutorials or access the help system. The Quick Start function is perfect for new users.

To help ease new users into new techniques and functions, Photoshop Elements features the Hints palette. Whenever you select a tool in Elements, a brief description of the tool's function appears in the Hints palette. If you need more information about any particular tool you can then click on the help button at the top of the Hints palette. Closely allied to the Hints palette is the Recipes palette. The Recipes palette is a very clever idea to help you learn how to perform a selection of multistep tasks in Elements while still leaving you in complete control over every stage. The Recipes provided enable you to learn step-by-step how to perform functions such as applying a gradient effect to an image, clean up a photo by removing dust and scratches and photo retouching among others. Using the Recipes automatically finds the correct menu commands and palette functions for you so you can learn where they are. New Recipes are under development and can be downloaded from the Adobe Web site.



The File Browser palette makes it simple to find images in a folder by displaying them as thumbnail images

Filter it out

Another big change is the method for applying filters and effects. In the world of the Photoshop professional you simply select the filter or effect from a drop-down menu. In the slightly less technical world of Elements, you can drag the effect from the Effects or Filter palette and drop them on to the image you are working on. This works really well. Another innovation is the File Browser palette. Instead of opening files at random from a folder on your hard drive, the file browser displays a thumbnail of every image in the folder so you can swiftly find the exact image you want to work on. To open it, simply drag it to the work area of Elements. This is one function that would definitely improve the full version of Photoshop.

Photoshop Elements is a welcome addition to the Adobe stable and is a great way for beginners and intermediate level users to get to grips with digital image manipulation. The target market for the program is crying out for a professional level application and Photoshop Elements fits the bill perfectly. It's powerful, has all the functions you need and is reasonably priced. Adobe has a sure-fire winner on its hands with Elements.

THE VERDICT

Features	★★★★★
Ease of use	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

"The target market for the program is crying out for a professional level application and Photoshop Elements fits the bill perfectly"

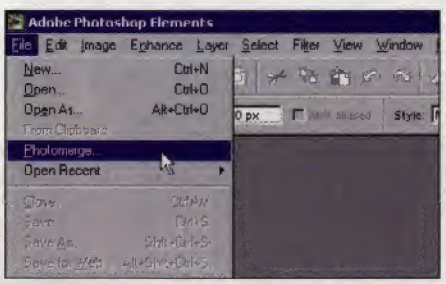
USING PHOTOMERGE

ONE OF THE impressive new tools Adobe has included in Photoshop Elements is the Photomerge tool. It has the ability to automatically scan a series of related; overlapping images and then stitches them together into a coherent whole. This can be a great help if you want to make a wraparound image of a room or scene or if you have taken several pictures of a landscape and want to combine them into a single image.

While most of the functions of Photomerge are automatic, it's still possible for you to manually adjust source images and use advanced blending techniques to merge the images. It's even possible to apply perspective and cylindrical mapping controls to modify the point of view of the image. To modify the perspective of the image you define a vanishing point at any position in the composite image. As soon as Photomerge gets under way, it will modify all of the source images so that they all use the same vanishing point and thus create a consistent image as a result. At any point during this process, you can use the Preview button to get an idea of what the final image will look like. This means that you are always in total control of the way the final image turns out.

1 Find your images

Before you can create your Photomerge masterpiece, you need at least two pages to stitch together. In this case we've used two sunset images from a recent holiday. The cloud patterns are quite complex, let's see how Photomerge copes.

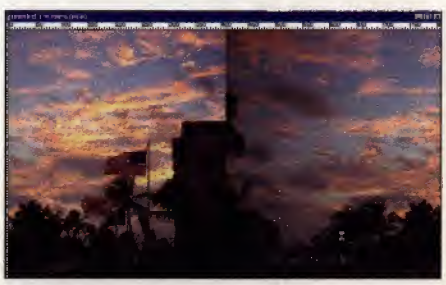


2 Launch Photomerge

Photomerge runs as a separate applet from within Photoshop Elements, although it is an integral part of the program. Unlike most other features, Photomerge can only be accessed from within the File menu – there isn't a separate Photomerge palette available.

3 Initial settings

When the Photomerge file chooser opens, click on the 'Add' button to choose your images. In the Settings section, decide if you want Photomerge to arrange the images automatically and then decide if you want to reduce the size of the original images.



4 Shuffling images

The next section of the process is automatic. Photomerge will now try and make the images match up by analysing the content and seeing if any parts of the pictures match up. You can see the images shuffle around as Photomerge goes to work.

5 Almost finished

The time the matching process takes depends on the number of source images and how complex they are. Even though the cloud elements in the two images are quite complex, Photomerge finished its matching up sequence in a few seconds.

6 Assembly complete

When Photomerge finishes matching your source images, it displays the final product ready for saving. If the program can't match any images up they are displayed in the bar at the top of the screen and you can manually arrange the images.

7 Final image

When you are satisfied that the image is suitable, click 'OK' in Photomerge and it closes down. The final complete image is displayed in the main Photoshop Elements work area where you can save it in the same way as any other image.

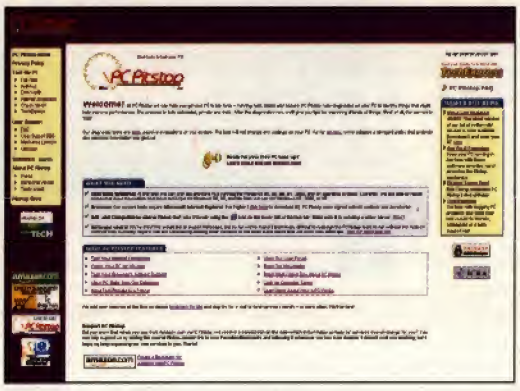
Upgrade your PC free online

Don't spend your money on PC upgrades – use these free sites to fix and tune up your computer for nothing. **Thomas Watson** shows you how

Unless you possess an encyclopedic knowledge of all things Windows, and don't have any friends whatsoever to take up your time, it's odds-on that your PC isn't performing to its full capabilities. Like the family hatchback, the household PC might appear to be doing its job well enough on a day to day basis, but take it to an expert for a going-over, and a whole gamut of potentially perilous problems will show themselves.

The first reaction of the car owner to this situation is to assume that the mechanic in question is inventing niggles and problems to earn extra money. But the simple fact of the matter is that most of the car-driving public don't have a clue about the mechanics of their beloved vehicle.

The same goes for PC owners. Up and down the country, users accept second-rate performance because they don't have the first inkling about how to fix the situation themselves. Just like the car owner, the answer is to call in an expert. However, having a PC once-over doesn't have to cost a penny, it can be done in minutes, and you won't even have to bother with trying to unplug the machine.



It's true – for a fitter, healthier PC, the only effort you have to make is to visit one of the Web sites that specialise in testing your PC remotely, and then make some subtle tweaks and changes to dramatically improve performance. Most of the services currently on the go will perform specialised tasks – testing and tinkering with specific parts of your Windows/Internet setup. We found a couple of sites, however, that will test more of your PC's functions than you knew existed. And the great thing is that you're still looking at no more than a few minutes for the whole process, from start to finish.

Of course, the natural response to this is to question the genuine possibility of testing your PC without installing reams of testing software. Well, these sites do require you to download tiny files in order for the diagnostic tests to run, but these will never

PC Pitstop will leave you feeling like you've put your computer in the hands of experts

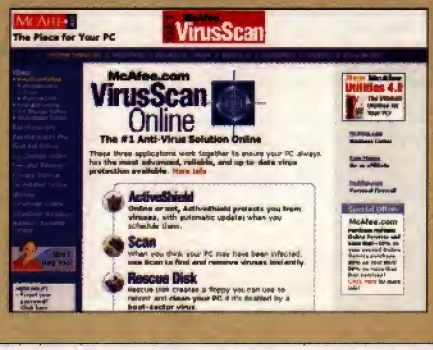
be as large as the software you'd need for a similar task. What's more, any problems that are picked up can be diagnosed and corrected instantly from the Net.

PC Pitstop

Undoubtedly, the king of the roost as far as online tuning up goes is PC Pitstop (**www.pcpitstop.com**). This should be your first stop if you ever have any kind of problem with your PC. Boasting a complexity of features yet a simplicity of use that most expensive programs completely fail to attain, PC Pitstop will leave you feeling like you've put your computer in the hands of experts. It works by downloading a set of DLLs (Dynamic Link Library – tiny executable files that perform specific functions), which performs the tests for you. So, the joy of PC Pitstop is

POWER UP YOUR PC

IF GETTING A decent range of tests for nowt doesn't please you, there are plenty of software alternatives out there – the main difference being that you have to pay for these. One of the most comprehensive system monitors and fixers is McAfee Office (**www.mcafee.com**). Costing £70, this software suite will do just about everything you could think of to keep your PC in working order. From virus checks to altering the appearance of Windows, it's all here. Another key name in the field is Norton, whose impressive range of computer solutions is vast to say the least (**www.symantec.com**). Norton Utilities, a mainstay of the portfolio, has been given a tweak for the 2001 edition, and now features more in the way of functions than ever before. What's more, it only costs £32.



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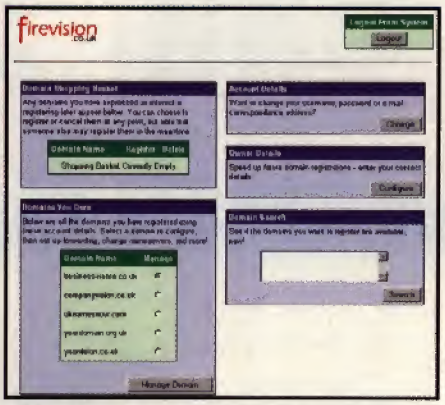
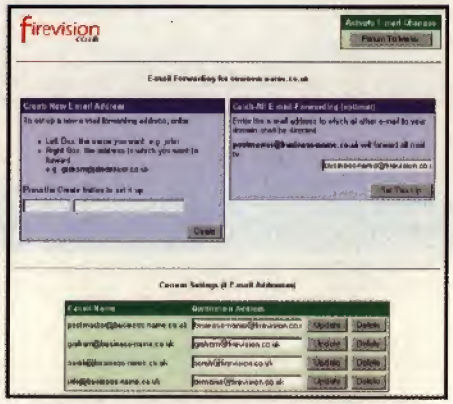
- ★ 25 email addresses
- ★ Email autoresponders
- ★ All-2-One email forwarding
- ★ All-2-One subdomain forwarding
- ★ 15 subdomains
- ★ Intelligent forwarding
- ★ Virtual business card
- ★ Holding page or for-sale page
- ★ Free extensive email support
- ★ No advertising!

£9.99
(£8.50 + VAT)



The front page of our easy-to-use domain management system.

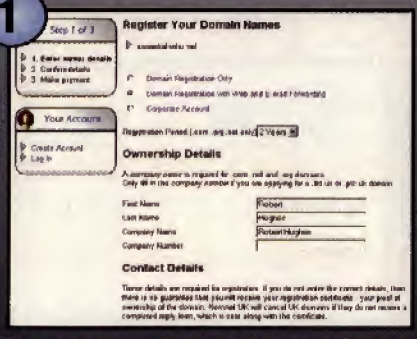


Setting up email addresses within the domain management system.

Before you buy a domain, why not try our services for free? Web forwarding, e-mail forwarding and e-mail autoresponders are all available for you to test, so that you can feel confident before you buy a domain that Firevision is the right choice for you.

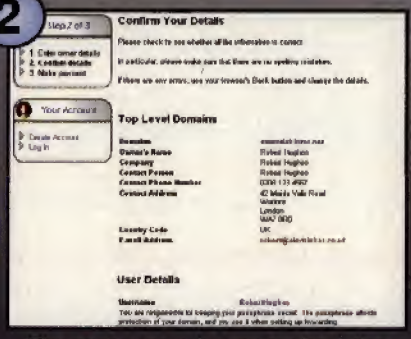
3 Simple Steps To Registering A Domain Name At Firevision

1



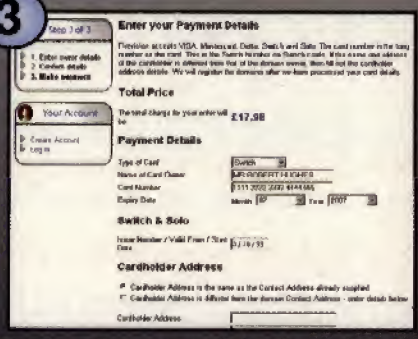
Once you have checked that your domain is available, the first step to registration is to enter the ownership and contact details.

2



The next page asks you to check the details are correct.

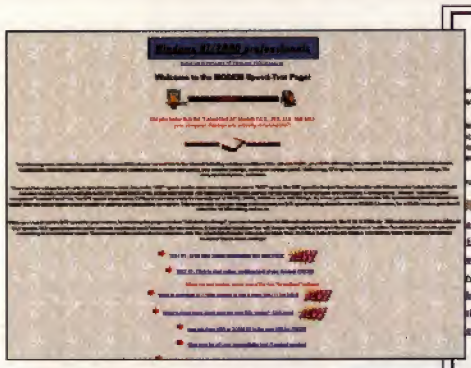
3

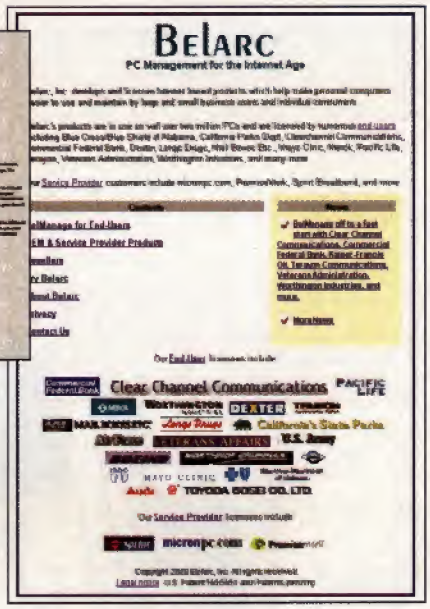


Finally, enter your card details, and your order will be processed, usually within minutes.

that the 'experts' you rely on so much are automated files, which trigger responses.

For the record, PC Pitsop will perform the following tests for you: system resources check, hard drives test to see if they need defragmenting/repairing, the famed 'ping' test to test the speed of your connection, an ActiveX test, as well as anti-virus checks. Sure, you could no doubt pick up far better versions of these functions by paying top dollar for high quality software, but this is free, god damn you, free.





Whether it's your modem you want to check up on, or a more general overview of how your PC runs, there are plenty of sites to help you

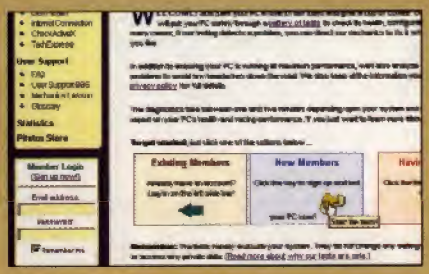
Belarc

If the splendour of PC Pitstop doesn't whet your whistle, there are a whole host of other sites you can trundle along to for PC help and testing. Belarc (**www.belarc.com**) provides you with possibly the most exhaustive description of your PC you'll ever need. Okay, so the eagle-eyed out there might spot that you do need to download a 500Kb file to perform the test, and that the test results are displayed on a locally hosted page (ie on your PC). The results you get are simply staggering in their depth of detail, though, with such information as your bus clock speed and a list of every piece of software even partly installed on your machine. Belarc won't actually perform any maintenance tasks for you, but this is the ideal stop for anyone unsure as to the current workings of their PC.

McAfee has a somewhat legendary name in the field of virus scanning, and it'll perform some online scanning for you at its site (**www.mcafee.com**). Unfortunately, McAffee is not as generous as it could have been, and users will have to register and pay a subscription to receive the service. Whether you're willing to part with

SORT OUT YOUR SYSTEM WITH PC PITSTOP

Use the free online diagnostic tests to fix Windows

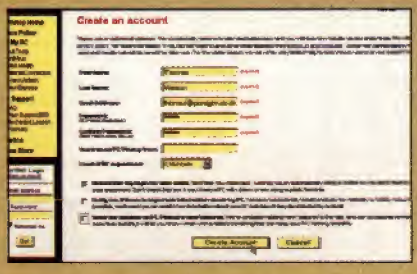


1 Visit PC Pitstop

Go to PC Pitstop (**www.pcpitstop.com**). On the home page, click on 'Learn more and get started now'. Because it's our first time here, click on 'New members' on the next page to be taken to the download page.

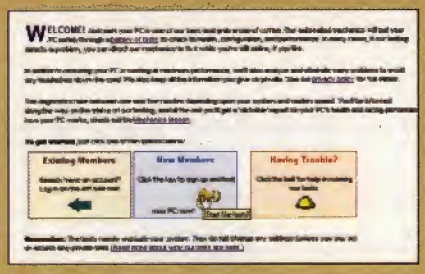
2 Download the utility

On the next screen, click on the 'Load the PC Pitstop utility' link to download the small file that will set your test and tune-up in motion. After it's downloaded, you'll be asked to accept the security certificate. Click 'Yes'.



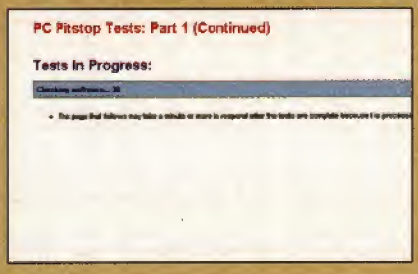
3 Sign up

It's best to sign up for the service, which lets you store your data on the PC Pitstop Web site. Click on 'Create an account', then fill in your details on the next page. You're now ready to test.



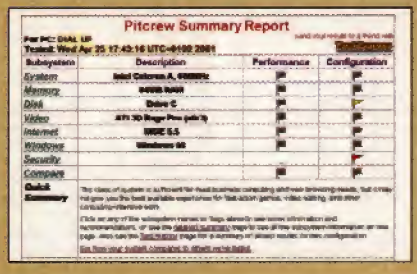
4 Starting again

Although you've now signed up, which means you should be logged in automatically, you will have to click on the same key icon as step one to proceed to the test, even though this says it's for new visitors.



5 Testing, testing

The test will now finally begin. You'll be kept abreast of the status of the test by a progress report telling you just what PC Pitstop is doing. The test will take a few minutes, as it is checking all sorts of things on your PC.



6 Your results

Once your PC has been tested by the PC Pitstop robots, you'll see the results. This will give you a detailed description of exactly what is going on with your PC, as well as some advice as well.

Available immediately.

You've had no problem getting business, and that's the problem. If you need help cutting through the communications chaos, try COMMUNICATE!™ *i*2000. It's easy-to-use unified messaging interface manages and stores all communications using your PC and existing contact information. Standard voice and fax features combined with advanced Internet capabilities make it the ultimate choice for the busy professional. So visit your local software retailer and employ COMMUNICATE! *i*2000. You can't afford not to have it.

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Testing your modem speed is the easiest function a Web site can perform on your PC

your hard-earned will no doubt be the major influence on signing up for this, although you can be guaranteed that the service will be top notch.

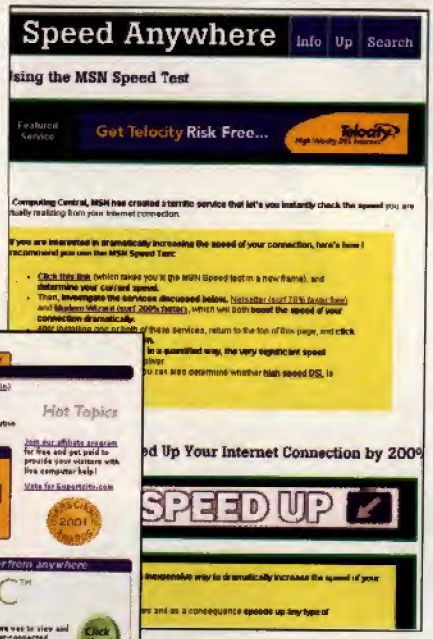
Modem thinking

Testing the speed of your modem is possibly the easiest function a Web site could perform on your PC, and you'll find a few good sites out there which do this with aplomb. Tacked on to one of the most appallingly unattractive sites we've ever seen, complete with superfluous modem noises on entering the home page, the Modem Speed Test Page (**http://msnhomepages.talkcity.com/WindowsWay/diagnostics/modem/modem1.html**), has a good set of modem testing options for you to choose from. As many of you no doubt know already, the connection speeds you see at the bottom right-hand screen are about as genuine as a series of election promises, and you'll be able to find just the rate your Net connection is actually moving at. You'll find another free modem speed test at **www.speedanywhere.com/speedanywhere/speedtest.html**, where the MSN name might be more appealing.

Often, you won't need specific help to see you through, and a mere update of your operating system drivers will suffice. There's a page of Microsoft updates with just this purpose in mind at **http://cws.internet.com/mspacks.html**, where you can get the latest add-ons to have Windows performing at its peak.

And if the very concept of all this computerised, automated help leaves you as cold as ice, why not take a visit to Expert City (**www.expertcity.com**). Here, you can communicate in real-time over your PC with a trained support worker, who can advise you on how to cure your ills. Considering most ISPs are keen to charge you 50p a minute for technical help, this could be the cheapskate path the bewildered skinflint is looking for.

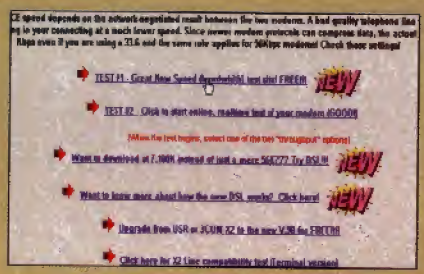
So, next time you notice a slight problem with your PC, a drop in speed or a horror with your hard drive, don't rush to spend your money on maintenance software. Just visit one of the many tune-up sites out there, and have the problem sorted for nothing. □

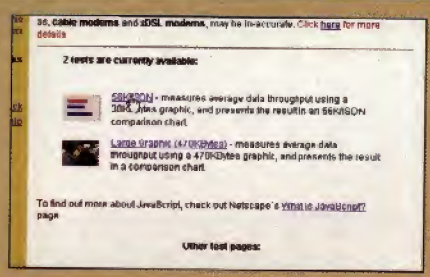


Before you start shouting at your ISP or phone company about your slow Internet connection, make sure the problem doesn't lie with your modem

TEST YOUR MODEM SPEED

Calculate the real speed of your modem



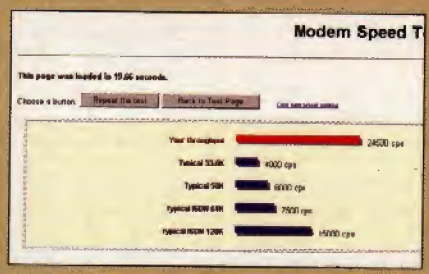


1 Where to go

There are a few sites to test your modem's speed. We've opted for the test available at **http://msnhomepages.talkcity.com/WindowsWay/diagnostics/modem/modem1.html**. Click on the first test link.

2 Start the test

On the page that loads, choose the relevant test for your connection (most probably 56Kb/ISDN). This will download a smallish image file to your computer, and calculate just how quickly it is transferred.

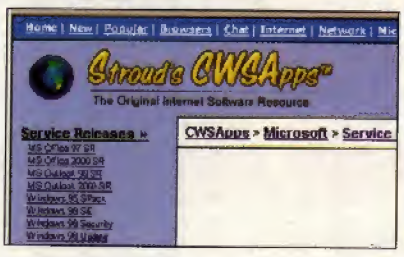


3 The test

The test will begin, which looks like nothing more than an image downloading in your browser. All sorts of tests are being done in the background, though, based around how long the image takes to download.

4 Result!

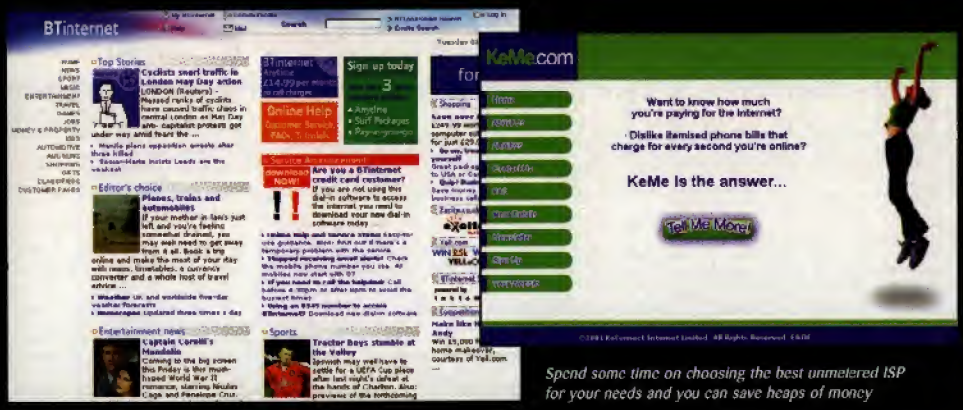
After the page has finished, you'll see your results. The figure next to the red bar shows the bytes per second rate of your modem, so 4000 is 4Kb a second. Our figure is so high because we tested our connection at work.



Unmetered ISP deals

ARE THE LATEST CROP OF UNMETERED ISPS, WHICH LET YOU BROWSE THE NET WITHOUT ANY PHONE BILLS, AS GOOD AS THEY SEEM? **MARK NEWMAN** LOOKS AT A DOZEN OF THE BEST

12 ISPS TESTED!



Spend some time on choosing the best unmetered ISP for your needs and you can save heaps of money

If you're a frequent, heavy Internet user, you shouldn't still be running up a huge phone bill with a free ISP. It's simply unnecessary, given the current crop of unmetered services on offer.

These let you log on to the Net for a single monthly subscription fee – starting from as little as £2/month or £25/year – and pay no telephone connection charges at all. They are 'unmetered' because they don't charge you by the minute, allowing you to log on and off whenever you want.

While these services have had a rocky year or so, with AltaVista, EzeSurf, CallNet 0800, Breathe and RedHotAnt all hitting the headlines for the wrong reasons, many of the existing services do look as though they'll stay in business for at least the rest of the year.

One factor that separates the good ISPs from the bad is the length of their cut-off periods. Most unmetered ISPs employ mandatory cut-offs to prevent users logging on for 24-hours a day, hogging bandwidth and thereby slowing down connection speeds. With some ISPs this means that you can't stay online for longer than an hour – not good if you're a Net gaming addict or a frequent software downloader. We've pointed out the cut-off times of all the top ISPs that have been listed in this feature.

You should also consider whether you need 24-hour unmetered access or whether off-peak access would be better suited to you. Do you use the Net during the daytime on weekdays or is most your Web browsing at weekends or evenings?

Also, consider how experienced you are at using the Net. Newcomers should pick an unmetered ISP offering low-cost technical support – you'll undoubtedly need to call the tech support line at some point and won't want to be saddled with premium rates.

Web site designers should pick services with plenty of free Web space – 50Mb is good, but unlimited space is even better! If you travel regularly then choose an ISP that lets you pick up messages via Webmail wherever you are in the world. And if you're a frequent online gamer, pick an ISP that provides either dedicated gaming servers or a fast Net connection.

The cheapest ISP ever?

One of the most intriguing newcomers is BigBlueSky (**www.bigbluesky.uk.net**) which offers 24-hour unmetered access with no cut-offs and an annual payment of just £25. Yes, just £25! The Scottish company promises to be different from other ISPs with its 'customer first' policy – although some *Practical Internet* readers have encountered problems with accessing the service. Others claim to have paid out money for the service and not heard anything back.

That said, registering for BigBlueSky is simple. In our tests, it never gave us the dreaded engaged tone and while we often had to spend five to ten minutes trying to connect, once we were online the service never cut us off. For those who do encounter problems, the tech support line is charged at national rate and is helpful.

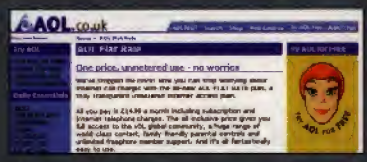
For a one-off payment of £25, it's very tempting. The connection rates and speeds are good, and should more than repay themselves in the long run. You do only get 5Mb of free Web space and a single email account, but does that matter when you're paying so little? We just wonder whether the service can really survive for very long on such low levels of income. Only time will tell.

Value for money

If you want more confidence in your ISP, then opting for one of the 'unmetered heavyweights' is sensible. Although AOL (**www.aol.co.uk**) uses its own unique software – rather than the more common Windows dial-up networking – it generally proves to be easy to set up. It's only when you come to remove the software that you hit problems. Eliminating all trace of its invasive installation from our PC proved almost as difficult as removing Peter Mandelson from office.

Once up and running, though, we found AOL to be reliable. We managed to achieve consistent connection speeds with no disconnections and no dropped

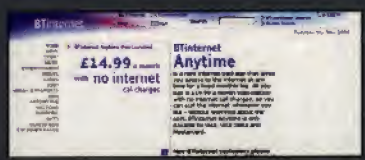
TOP 12 UNMETERED ISPs



AOL
WWW.AOL.CO.UK
Cost: £14.99/month
Tech support: Free
Email accounts: 7
Web space: 14Mb
Good: No cut-off period. Available to non-BT users
Bad: Software can play havoc with your PC

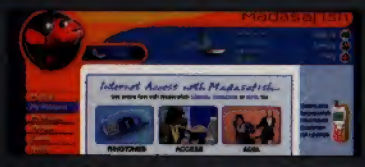
LINEONE SURFTIME
WWW.LINEONE.NET
Cost: £15.99/month or £9.99/month off peak
Tech support: 50p/minute
Email accounts: 5
Web space: 50Mb
Good: No cut-off period. Good signup incentives. Great tech support
Bad: Pricey. Must be BT customer

FREESERVE ANYTIME
WWW.FREESERVE.NET
Cost: £12.99/month
Tech support: 50p/minute
Email accounts: Unlimited
Web space: 15Mb
Good: Cheap. Generally reliable to connect to and fast too
Bad: 2 hour cut-off. Some users have reported access problems



BT ANYTIME
WWW.BTINTERNET.COM
Cost: £14.99/month
Tech support: 50p/minute
Email accounts: 5
Web space: 10Mb
Good: Plenty of bandwidth. Fairly reliable
Bad: 2 hour cut-off. Can be slow

TOP 12 UNMETERED ISPs



MADASAFISH
www.madasafish.com
Cost: £27.99/month or £11.99 off-peak
Tech support: National BT rate
Email accounts: Unlimited
Web space: Unlimited
Good: Four hour cut-off. Fast and reliable
Bad: Pricey. Must be BT customer

JINGS
www.jings.com
Cost: £27.99/month or £11.99 off-peak
Tech support: National BT rate
Email accounts: Unlimited
Web space: Unlimited
Good: Four hour cut-off. Fast and reliable
Bad: Pricey. Must be BT customer

CLARANET
www.clara.net
Cost: £9.99/month off-peak
Tech support: Local rate
Email accounts: Unlimited
Web space: 50Mb
Good: Cheap and flexible. Reliable with good tech support
Bad: Two hour cut-off. Must be BT customer

PLUSNET
www.plus.net
Cost: £25.99/month
Tech support: National rate
Email accounts: Unlimited
Web space: Unlimited
Good: No cut-off period. Lots of free extras for Web designers
Bad: Pricey. Resources fair use policy

One factor that separates the good ISPs from the bad is the length of their cut-off periods

connections after periods of inactivity. At peak times, the service seemed a little sluggish, but how many ISPs can boast lightning-fast connections at 7pm during the week? Not many.

Comprehensive technical support is available through a freephone 0800 number – a particular bonus – and while there is often a wait at busy times, the quality of the advice cannot be faulted. The customer representative was extremely friendly and our queries were dealt with in a satisfactory manner.

AOL's monthly charge may be a full two pounds higher than Freeserve's (reviewed below), but beginners looking for technical support will undoubtedly make big savings. There's also 14Mb of free Web space – not huge, but enough for a decent home page. Whether or not you decide to go with AOL will probably hinge on your opinion of AOL's unique environment. People tend to love or loathe AOL.

BT or not BT?

BT's unmetered service, called BTinternet Anytime (**www.btinternet.com**), certainly provides some relief after AOL. The installation is far quicker and painless. To use the service, install a desktop 'dialler' instead of going directly through Dial-Up Networking.

In our tests, browsing the Net with BTinternet proved to be an enjoyable experience, and despite the two hourly disconnections, it was trouble-free. We did sometimes find that it took more than one attempt to dial into the service, but on the whole, connection speeds were very steady and rarely lower than 40K.

On first appearances, BT's portal site is unlikely to win many fans, but further investigation reveals a host of useful extras including Instant Messaging, free SMS and chat. Add this to the free child-protection software (Cyber Patrol) on the installation CD and there are few grounds for complaint.

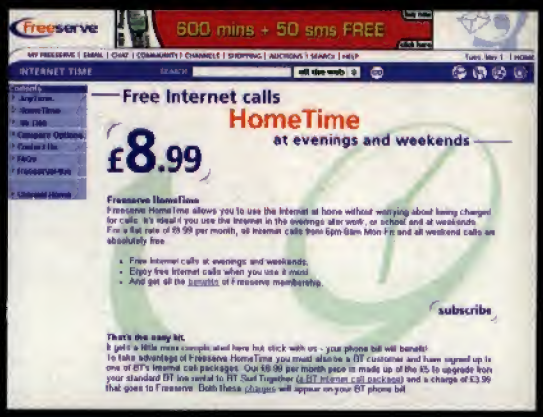
When we contacted BTinternet's technical support service, the staff were courteous and knowledgeable. Impressive. After one question they even arranged for an engineer to call us back free of charge.

While BT's service may carry the same monthly subscription rate as AOL, it actually works out more pricey when you take into account AOL's free technical support. Considering that BT should be in a position to offer the cheapest deal of all, this is puzzling.

Freeserve frenzy

Installing Freeserve Anytime (**www.freeserve.com**) is a little strange in that newcomers need to take out a free membership with the ISP's local rate service before they can sign up to the unmetered offering. Existing members can simply sign up online without the need to reconfigure their Internet settings.

Once complete, Freeserve's sign-up process proved painless and the Internet configuration file we had to download merely added a new icon into our Dial-Up Networking folder, making connecting to the Net far more straightforward than launching AOL.



HAVE YOUR SAY...

FIND OUT WHAT OTHER USERS THINK OF THESE UNMETERED ISPS...

NET 4 NOWT
www.net4nowt.com
Excellent source for ISP listings, news and discussion.

BT OPENWOE
www.btopenwoe.org.uk
Have your shout about BT's broadband Internet service here.

ISP REVIEW
www.ispreview.co.uk
Good discussion forums and a monthly 'worst ISP' award.

UK ISP USER GROUP
www.ukispuserugroup.co.uk
New guide that aims to bridge the gap between users and ISPs.

Although Freeserve does disconnect you promptly after two hours, on almost every occasion we connected to the service first time and managed to stay online through periods of inactivity. Even when we were disconnected we managed to dial straight back in first time.

When things go wrong, the Freeserve site is an excellent place to turn to. Its depth of support will be sufficient to solve most common problems without having to turn to the 50p/minute helpline. This is good, considering that we found it difficult to get someone to answer our calls. When we tried the separate phone number provided for Apple Mac users, we got through straightaway. All of the advice was helpful.

In terms of cost, Freeserve managed to beat BT. At two pounds cheaper per month and with identical technical support charges you'll save £24 over the course of a year by signing up with Freeserve's Anytime package. So if AOL's not for you, Freeserve looks like a good option.

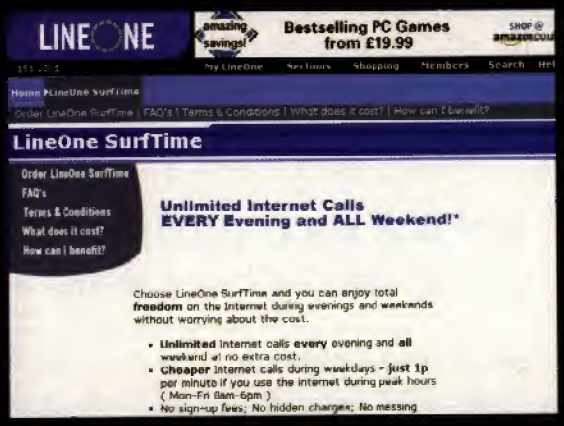
LineOne

Just taken over by Italian ISP, Tiscali (see page 11), the deal offered by LineOne (www.lineone.net) could well change over coming months, but its current offer looks tempting. It scores highly for us for its lack of a cut-off time. This means that you can browse the Net for as long as you like. But you will pay for the privilege at £18.99/month.

Fortunately, the installation is one of the simplest you'll come across. The CD-ROM offers customised installations which mean you don't have to re-install Internet Explorer if you don't want to, so you can manually configure the set up. We got connected and up-and-running in barely five minutes.

LineOne proved to be more reliable than most other ISPs here too, with consistently high connection speeds, even at peak times.

LineOne's technical support line is not cheap at 50 pence/minute and the ISP's Web site provides little in the way of in-depth technical support, thus steering you towards the premium rate line. But when *Practical Internet* called, the advice given was quick and excellent, so the final bill wasn't too steep after all. When you also take into consideration the wide range of free incentives on offer – a CD-ROM worth £29.99 and other freebies – plus the ISP's superb content-rich site and generous 50Mb of free Web space, it's a competitive deal that's well worth considering.



Best of the rest

If the big hitters aren't tempting to you, then there are other alternatives. New family safe

"Like me, Densitron have got plenty of spare capacity"

With other ISP's you stand a slim chance of getting all your information down the line. With Densitron's fully resilient 45Mb/s backbone and reserved channels throughout the world, you're guaranteed all the capacity you need.

The heavy demands of today's traffic are easily met with our connections to your server or rack. A fully backed power supply means you don't have to worry about it all going belly-up. For complete peace of mind take a look at the services we can offer:

- Fully backed power supply
- Remote power management
- 24 hour monitoring
- Incremental back-up service
- Physical access to your rack
- High security keycard access
- Separate high security room
- CCTV monitoring

So when security, power and quality of service are important, we are one of the greatest!

www.densitron.net

Tel: 01959 542000 email: info@densitron.net

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Free website quotation

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Just tick your requirements and fax it back to PNC Tele.com on 08700 788 777 or call for a free quotation or call 08700 771 155.

Do you have a website?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes (If YES would you like a quotation for a re-design?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Domain Name?

- ☐ I don't have one
- ☐ I already have one:

www. _____

Home Page?

- ☐ Simple
- ☐ Flash Intro
- ☐ High Impact

Page Count?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 5
- ☐ Other _____

Logo Design?

- ☐ I have a logo
- ☐ Please design one for me

Site Graphics?

- ☐ Minimal
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Extensive
- ☐ Flash throughout site

E-mail handling?

- ☐ Forward all mail to my current address
- ☐ Please supply an account

Web Space?

- ☐ 5Mb
- ☐ 20Mb
- ☐ 75Mb
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I don't know

Forum?

- ☐ Simple message forum
- ☐ Complex message forum

Chat Room?

- ☐ Simple chat room
- ☐ Complex chat room solution

Database?

- ☐ Product Database
- ☐ User Database
- ☐ User Login

Shopping Cart?

- ☐ Up to 10000 products
- ☐ Over 10000 products

Hit Counter?

- ☐ Standard
- ☐ Hidden

Hosting?

- ☐ Statistics
- ☐ E-mail handling
- ☐ Maintenance

If you require any further information or would be interested in coming to PNC Tele.com to discuss your requirements in more detail, please complete the details below so we can contact you, for a free, no obligation discussion.

Your name: _____

Your email: _____ **Your phone:** _____

You can view examples of our work at www.pnctele.com.

We built www.SmartOne.co.uk voted number one network performer in November's THE NET Magazine.

If you do not wish to receive further faxes from us please call 0870 4420554

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ISP V21 (www.v21.co.uk) promises to block access to all adult material on the Web. It has a team of 'cyber nannies' who constantly monitor the service, guaranteeing peace of mind for parents everywhere. Its 24-hour unmetered service costs a not unreasonable £14.99/month.

Abel Internet has a well-earned reputation for being a solid and reliable performer and its unmetered service enhances this. The service comes with an unlimited number of email accounts, a handsome 50Mb of free Web space and a three hour-cut off period. It provides two services – off-peak unmetered access through Dial LeisureTime at £11.99/month and 24-hour access through Dial Anytime at £27.99/month. A wide range of handy payment options are outlined at **www.abel.co.uk/abel_dial.html.**

Powered by Madasafish's popular TimeZone package, Jings (**www.jings.com**) is a fast, feature-filled ISP that offers plenty of incentives to sign up, namely unlimited free Web space and unlimited email addresses. It's not one of the cheaper unmetered ISPs available – 24-hour access costs a whopping £27.99/month – but there is a four-hour cut off period so users can enjoy longer sessions than many other ISPs and it's damn fast too.

KeMe (**www.keme.com**) is another newcomer that's pledging to be closer to its users than other ISPs. It claims to be able to connect anyone to its unmetered service – regardless of whether they have a BT line or not. It was set to launch as we went to press in late May and costs £14.95/month – making it the third cheapest service on test here.

AOL's many features and free tech support make it the clear winner

Technical support costs 50p/minute and it also offers unlimited email accounts plus 50Mb of Web space. The usual pay-off is a cut-off time of two hours. That said, this looks an impressive offering.

Who's the winner?

After hours of testing, we found AOL to be the best all-round performer and certainly the best in terms of value.

While this service may not appeal to all Net users – particularly more advanced ones – its many features and free tech support make it a clear winner here. It's a more attractive bet than the other 11 services tested here. That said, the line-up of unmetered ISPs is changing all the time, so keep reading...

IS UNMETERED NET ACCESS WORTH YOUR WHILE?

FIND OUT HOW LONG YOU'D NEED TO SPEND ONLINE EACH MONTH TO MAKE SIGNING UP TO AN UNMETERED ISP WORTHWHILE *

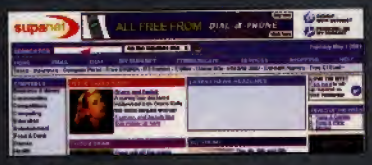
	AOL	BTINTERNET ANYTIME	FREESERVE ANYTIME
During the day	7 hours	7 hours	6 hours
Off-peak	17 hours	17 hours	15 hours
Weekend	25 hours	25 hours	22 hours

** Calculations based on BT's pricing structure*

Using this table, you can see that anyone who uses the Net during the day will gain huge benefits from signing up with an unmetered service, with only two hours a week needing to be spent online before making savings.

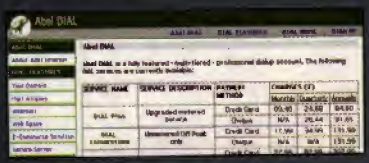
Those who mainly use the Internet in the evenings will need to spend just over four hours a week online to see benefits, while those who browse at the weekends will need to spend over six hours online each Saturday and Sunday.

TOP 12 UNMETERED ISPs



SUPANET
www.supanet.com
Cost: £12.99/month
Tech support: 50p/minute
Email accounts: Unlimited
Web space: 20Mb
Good: Very affordable
Bad: Two hour cut-off. Some users complain of slow access speeds

WORLD ONLINE UNLIMITED
www.worldonline.co.uk
Cost: £14.99/month
Tech support: 50p/minute
Email accounts: Unlimited
Web space: 20Mb
Good: No cut-off
Bad: Tech support often busy at peak times



ABEL DIAL
www.abel.co.uk
Cost: £27.99/month or £11.99 off peak
Tech support: 25p/minute
Email accounts: Unlimited
Web space: 50Mb
Good: Three hour cut-off. Feature-laden service
Bad: Has 100 hour/month limit

BIGBLUESKY
www.bigbluesky.uk.net
Cost: £25/year
Tech support: National rate
Email accounts: 1
Web space: 5Mb
Good: No cut-offs, cheap and can be used with any ISP
Bad: It's so cheap that you wonder whether it can survive

Create faster, smaller Web graphics

Does your Web site load at a snail's pace? **David Encill** suggests you think about optimising your images

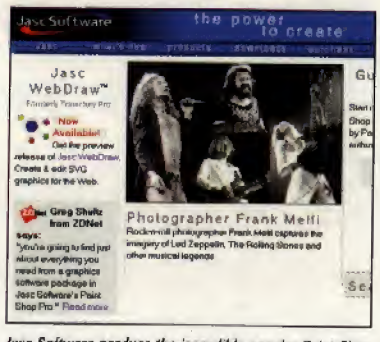
So many Web sites are, put simply, too damn slow or just plain dull. Although the speed can be due to excessive Internet traffic or a turgid connection, much of the time it is because of poor optimisation of the images used on the pages. Anyone visiting your site could then be excused from going elsewhere...

Altering graphics to make them leaner and faster is not such a daunting prospect, though, and can be performed very quickly and easily with the aid of a variety of programs.

Using a sufficient number of graphics in your Web site is also important to ensure that the presentation of your site is not compromised. Even a small, succinct graphic can help to break up large portions of text if it's used wisely and can make all the difference between a plain boring site and one having zest and imagination.

Web image types

There are three main bitmapped image types supported by the latest Web browsers, all of which can be compressed to save file size and, more importantly, download times. The most popular are JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts) and GIF (Graphic Interchange Format), both of which are ideal for transporting files across the Internet, due to the compression techniques that permit small file sizes.



Jasc Software produce the incredibly popular Paint Shop Pro, which now includes a Wizard for all file types

Try Grafomaniac for some amazing Paint Shop Pro plug-in filters

Any image format can be further categorised into what compression technique is employed: 'lossy' or 'lossless'. A GIF image is saved as lossless, thereby retaining the original detail while compressing files quite substantially using LZW compression (named after the creators, Messrs Lempel, Ziv and Welch).

The third image format, PNG (Portable Network Graphics) is less well-known but breaches the gap between the two major formats. It allows any amount of colour-depths from 1-bit (two colours) to 48-bit and employs a more advanced LZ compression technique than GIF.

A 'lossy' format is quite different in that it works on the basis that some image information can, quite literally, be discarded. JPEG is one such format and works on the basis that the human eye can perceive changes in brightness but not colour. As a result, it decides that down-sampling to the two chrominance channels can be made with no appreciable difference in the image. Other mathematical equations are then applied, such as Discrete Cosine Transformation, before final quantisation and compression.

A comparison of three differently compressed JPEGs. From the top, the levels are 10%, 40% and 70%, weighing in at 32Kb, 15Kb and 10Kb respectively. Can you tell the difference in the full-sized images?

The standards committee controlling the use and specification of the JPEG format has now developed a new version called JPEG 2000 – somewhat contradictorily to be released this year – offering improved image quality at even higher compression ratios.

The last file type worthy of our consideration is Flash, although the only problem here is that a dedicated and rather expensive program has to be purchased to use it. Also, a visitors to your site will have to download a plug-in for the browser (although the author, Macromedia at **www.macromedia.com**, reckons 95% of the world has this!). Flash differs from the three bitmapped formats in that it uses 'vector' graphics, where lines are defined for the start and end points and, optionally, mathematical expressions for when curves are required. The

You can use The JPEG Wizard from Pegasus Imaging, totally free of charge!

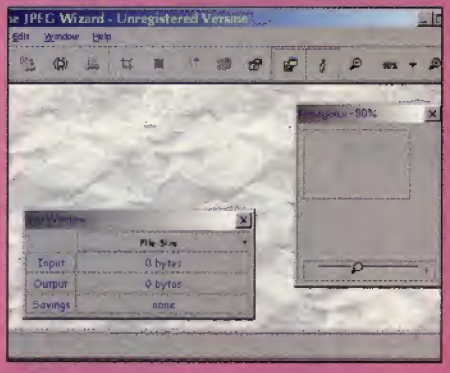
end-result can be a highly detailed graphic with an extremely small file size that can be enlarged infinitely without loss of detail. However, the Flash environment goes further than just static images, and can be used to create animations, rollover buttons and sophisticated menus with sliders and drop-downs. Now becoming increasingly popular with professional Web designers, it is possible to find entire pages that are designed entirely with this software.

Which graphic goes where?

With virtually no exceptions the two main image types, JPEG and GIF, fall into two

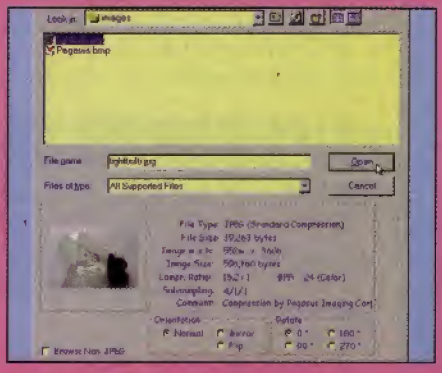
CUTTING JPEG IMAGES DOWN TO SIZE

HOW TO USE JPEG WIZARD TO ALTER THE FILE SIZES OF YOUR IMAGES



1 Install the software

JPEG Wizard is totally free software that can make an incredible difference to your images. Get it from **www.jpg.com/products/freewizard.html** Install the software onto your hard disk and then run the program.



2 Pick an image

You can try one of the supplied images, or use your own. Click 'File' then 'Open' and select the image from the File Selector. Here the Light Bulb image created an instant 33KB saving – over six seconds of download time.

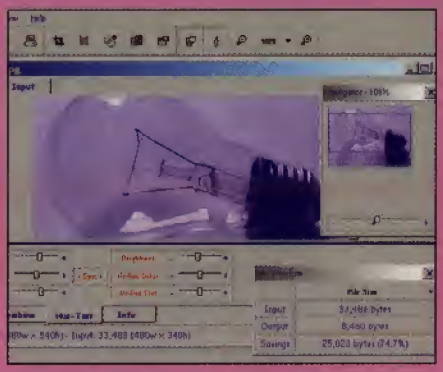
3 Remove unnecessary elements

The first tweak that can be applied is cropping any unwanted portions of the image. From the main window, select 'Edit' then 'Crop Main Image...'. The purple dotted line surrounding the image can now be adjusted to suit.

CUTTING JPEG IMAGES DOWN TO SIZE CONTINUED...

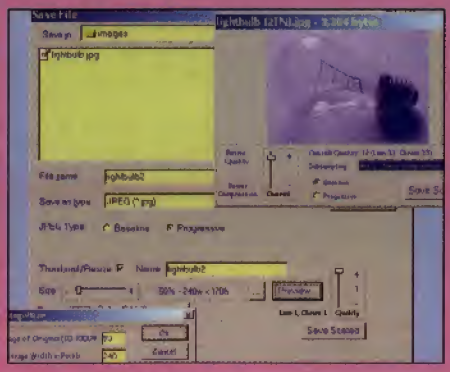
4 Compressing the image

The level of compression can often be 50% or more, while retaining an acceptable appearance without noticeable loss of detail. Here, a small adjustment to the compression slider has made a massive 25Kb saving.



5 Correcting the colour

Any colour corrections can be applied at this stage, including contrast, brightness, saturation and tint. This can be useful if you need to colour-match any image to the scheme used in your own Web site.



6 Save the file

If the image is too large, this can be remedied by selecting 'File' then 'Save As...', and pressing 'Thumbnail/Resize' in the following dialog box. From the original 39Kb file size, the image is now less than 3.5Kb.

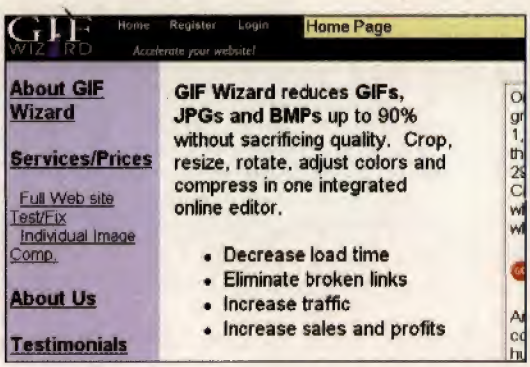
clearly defined categories of use. JPEG is far better for continuous tone images, such as photographs, as it supports 24-bit colour; three channels of red, green and blue, comprising 8-bits each. This provides a grand total of 16,777,216 colours, calculated by 224, or two multiplied by itself 24 times. Impressive stuff indeed.

Normally, a reduction in image quality will not be visible on the Web page

The disadvantage of GIF is that it only supports a 256-colour (8-bit or 28) palette, while the LZW compression used is far better for 'flat' images, that is images composed of blocks of colour rather than graduated tints. However, most graphics used to construct a Web site, such as clipart, buttons, menu options, and so on, can normally be converted to GIF without an appreciable loss of quality. Also, GIF does have one major advantage over JPEG in that it offers transparency for any one colour.

However, whereas PNG offers the greater variety of image types it does not fare well when comparing file sizes against a similar JPEG, although it does much better as a 256-colour format against GIF. So why isn't PNG more popular? The answer is lack of awareness by users and the lack of support from Web browsers less than version 4. However, PNG does have one silver bullet in its armoury: alpha transparency, where instead of defining a single colour, it can be applied to 65,536 levels of transparency for each pixel. Essentially this means that images with alpha transparency can be blended perfectly with multi-coloured backgrounds.

WebGraphics Optimiser costs $39 (around £25) but can optimise JPEG and GIF with several useful tools included



GIF Wizard is an online resource to compress your GIFs. No software required

Payback time

In most cases, a reduction in the quality of images will not be that visible on the Web page. A photographic image saved as a JPEG, even with a reasonably high level of compression, can still look perfectly acceptable and one of the best tools to prove this is 'The JPEG Wizard' from Pegasus Imaging, **www.jpegwizard.com**. Likewise, a reduction in the colour palette of a GIF image can reduce the file size substantially with programs like Paint Shop Pro from Jasc Software (**www.jasc.com**) offering leading-edge optimisation.

One less important factor when saving the image concerns the parameters used. When viewing your site directly from your hard dis,k it might look really snappy, particularly when your machine has the latest Athlon or Pentium processor installed. But remember that 'WWW' stands for 'World Wide Web' and your site can be viewed by anyone with Net access, anywhere in the world, including impoverished Third World countries where 25 Megahertz processors (40 times slower than 1GHz) and slow modems might be the norm.

GIF or PNG? After reducing the palette to 64 colours, saving this image created a 22Kb GIF and a 16Kb PNG

So if a JPEG is being used, it is best to consider 'Progressive encoding'. All image editing programs will offer a single 'slider bar' that can be used to define the level of compression, but not all offer this useful facility. The technique allows images to be displayed in a manner similar to a venetian blind being closed, where the image quality is improved with successive passes.

A similar technique to this is available for the GIF and PNG format and is called 'interlacing'. Whether you use a Progressive JPEG or interlaced GIF, it is worth considering as the difference in file size is immaterial.

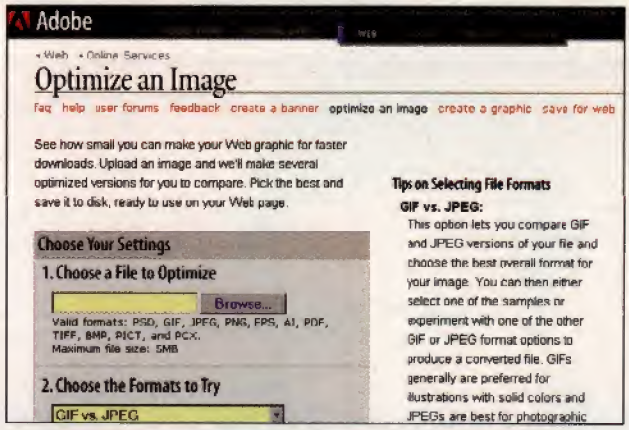
Another trick that can be employed is pre-loading the images by opening your site to a 'splash' page that incorporates some special JavaScript code. The splash page normally has a simple 'Welcome' message that waits for a few seconds before loading the true home page. Essentially this is a delaying tactic to provide time for all the graphics to load as a background task, while the user looks at a dummy screen! An example of this script is on the cover CD-ROM, courtesy of Website Abstraction.

Thumbscrews

The most important factors in creating a faster and leaner site are the size and type of image. If you have several large photographs that you wish to include on your Web site – don't! Instead, consider placing 'thumbnails' (small representative images) on the page, with external links to the larger images. This can be created by changing the hyperlink as follows: <A HREF='myfile.jpg' TARGET='_blank'>. This allows anyone visiting your site to see the thumbnails quickly, while avoiding unnecessary delays waiting for the full-size images to load.

One point about smaller photographic images such as thumbnails is that sometimes they are best saved as 256-colour GIF or PNG, even if the file size is slightly larger. This is because the JPEG format requires an overhead from the processor, so while the image can be downloaded quickly over the Internet, there can be a perceptible delay while it is decoded. Again, remember that not everyone has an ultra-fast machine.

When creating GIF images you may not be aware that reducing the number of colours can make a



Adobe's 'Optimise an Image' is an online service. They can even suggest the best file type for your images

Pixellation can sometimes be the pay-off for reducing the file size of your Web site's graphics

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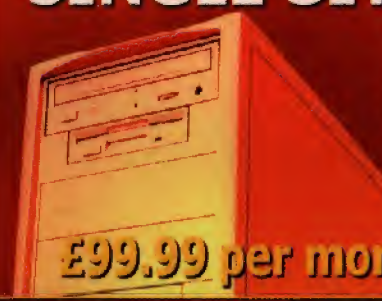

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Jasc
www.jasc.com
Paint Shop Pro (PSP) is the popular image editing program.

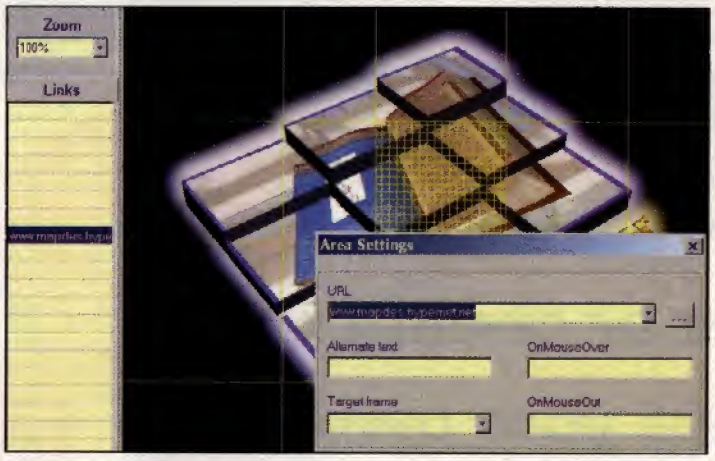
Grafomaniac
http://hem.passagen.se/grafoman
Freeware plug-in filters for PSP, with many links to other imaging sites.

Pegasus Imaging
www.jpegwizard.com
Freeware for the ultimate 'squishability' on JPEG images.

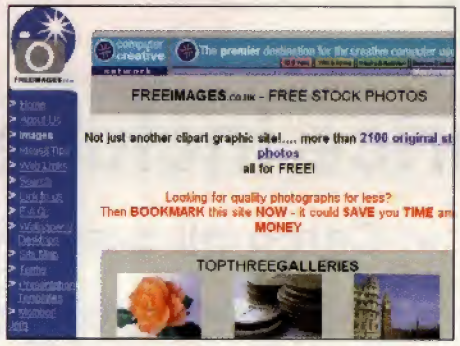
GIF Wizard
www.gifwizard.com
Great resource for reporting ideal compression levels of your GIFs.

Adobe
http://webservices.adobe.com/optimize
Similar to GIF Wizard but covering many more image formats.

Macromedia
www.macromedia.com
Suppliers of Flash, Fireworks and other Web graphic tools



HTML ImageSplitter is just the job for creating custom image maps. Many features including 'rollover' animation support



Stuck for a suitable photo? Try Freeimages.co.uk – it does exactly what it says on the page

The most important factor in creating a faster site is the image sizes

significant difference to the file size and, much of the time, reducing the number of colours below 64 will not be perceptible, particularly with logos and buttons. Naturally, if the image uses just a single hue then consider reducing the colours to 16 or less, depending on whether shades are being used.

One really bad habit of some less experienced Web designers is to reduce the image size by altering the width and height attributes within the IMG element. You wait ages for the image to load, then feel cheated when it's displayed at a much smaller size.

Sheer torture

Sounding like terms used in medieval torture, thumbnails, crunchers and splicers are all tools that can make a massive difference to your site. There are a massive number of tools to optimise your images that can be found on the Web, but if you only have a few images, the cost is probably not worthwhile. In this case you might like to consider online graphic optimisation such as Adobe, **http://webservices.adobe.com** and GIF Wizard at **www.gifwizard.com**.

Image slicing is a method for composing large images from several small ones. The main image is often chopped up so that each smaller portion can be used as a menu button complete with hyperlink. There is a slight downside, as each image file needs its own header (the mandatory portion of the file containing the image data) meaning this is being duplicated. Consequently, splitting the image into fewer portions is advisable.

A decent Image Splitter that also produces the relevant HTML code can be found at **http://mapdes.hypermart.net** from Forthtech Software and although not freeware, the fee of $19.12 (about £13) is pretty negligible.

BuMPy JPEGs

Before you all go off madly compressing photographic images to blazes, remember that the image quality of JPEG does degrade, and repeated saves just compound the problem. For this reason you should always retain the original image in a lossless format, such as BMP or TIFF, from which you then have a working template.

Even though the information given here should help create faster, leaner Web sites, eventually all these topics will become superfluous when ADSL (or whatever future Internet connection prevails) becomes widespread. Until then, however, they will help your site along. □

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Networkshop

THE HANDS-ON SECTION OF PRACTICAL INTERNET HELPS YOU USE THE WEB'S BEST SOFTWARE AND ONLINE SERVICES TO GET EVEN MORE FROM YOUR NET CONNECTION

In this section:

THERE'S SO MUCH out there on the Web that it's easy to lose track of it all. Browsing sites is just a small fraction of what you can do. With a little help, you can transform and improve the way you use the Net.

There are huge numbers of programs that you can pick up on the Internet to give your PC added features and functions. Whether you want to create your own eye-catching Web site, add some sparkle to an existing one, or simply make sure that your copy of Internet Explorer is working in tip-top condition, you'll find something out there that does the job.

This is where we come in. Each month we explain clearly and precisely how to use current Internet software and HTML code to get the results that you want. From power browsing to graphical site tweaks, you'll find our range of tutorials helpful and informative, pointing you in the direction of the things we think will improve your online life.

From this month, we're introducing a new 'quick method' feature on some tutorials. If you want a quick look at the software being spoken about, but aren't sure about completing 13 steps, our '1-2-3' method will give you the ideal introduction. Sure, you'll get far more out of the program by following the main tutorial, but the 'quick method' will provide the perfect opportunity for you to see just what the program can do.

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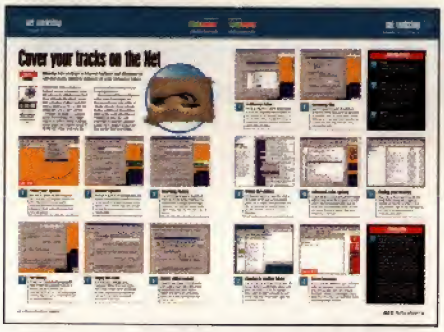
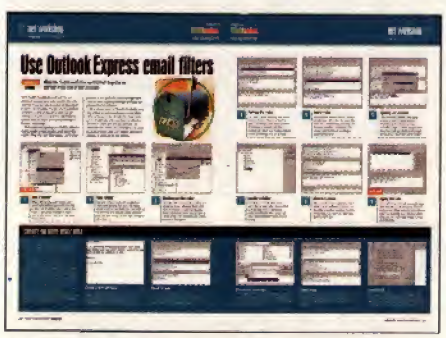


Don't let your History and Temporary Internet Files folders give away valuable information about your browsing habits again. Follow our simple guide to covering your tracks with IE



This month, we've given you THREE different mini-tutorials on Outlook Express. We show you how to set up filters, create an auto-replying message, and picking up work email from home

Downloading large files from the Net can be a nightmare, with many things blighting your progress. Show downloads who's boss with our top tips on using Go!Zilla

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Cover your tracks on the Net

PROJECT 1
TUTORIAL

How to: Use settings in Internet Explorer and Windows to remove every shred of evidence of your browsing habits

You can find Internet Explorer on this month's Practical Internet CD

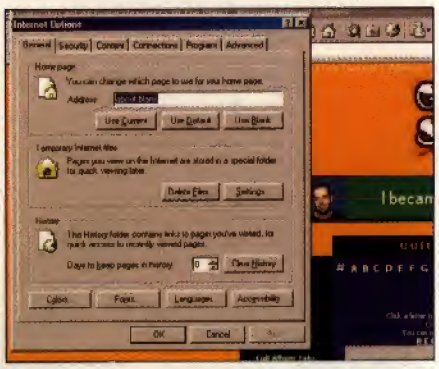
EVERY TIME YOU use Internet Explorer, it saves information about the sites you've visited to your hard drive. Although this speeds up your Net connection, it also means that anyone using your PC can find out which sites you've been visiting.

Whether by design or accident, we've all visited sites we'd rather keep to ourselves. And considering many people use a family-owned PC for the Net, it pays to ensure that your hard drive is cleaned of your browsing evidence.

The trouble with Internet Explorer is that, even if you empty the Temporary Internet Files folder at regular intervals, you're still only sorting a fraction of the problem. Much of the saved information is hidden from view, and only accessible through the advanced options of IE. Read on to find out how to clear all of your folders.

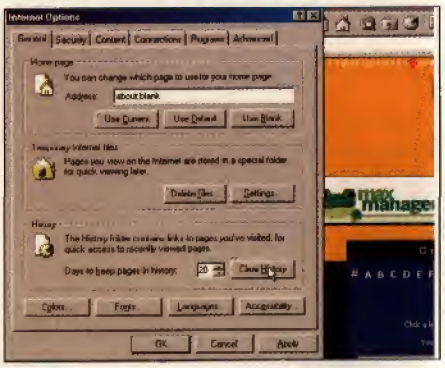
1 Widen your options

After you've opened up Internet Explorer, the first step to removing the evidence of a browsing session is to open up the Internet Options box. You can find this by clicking on 'Tools' in the main menu, then 'Internet Options'.



2 Internet Options

Although it doesn't look that impressive, this options screen is where you will find most of the options for covering your tracks. In this Options screen, you can adjust the settings for both the Temporary Internet Files and the History folder.



3 Rewriting History

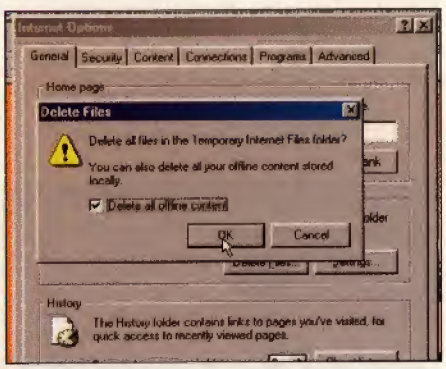
One of the easiest ways for someone to check up on your browsing habits is the History folder. To remove all of the links stored here, you just have to click on the 'Clear History' button at the bottom-right of the box.

4 No History

To save you regularly having to purge the History folder, we suggest that you set up Internet Explorer to do it for you automatically. Move the 'Days to keep pages in history' figure to zero, and the History will be emptied every day.

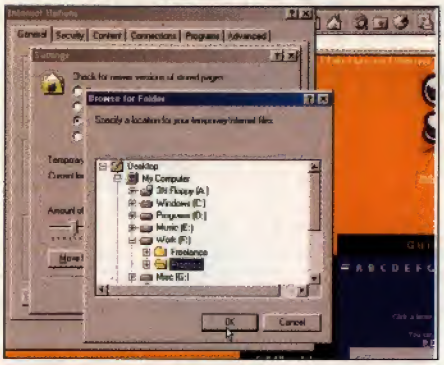
5 Empty the cache

In IE, the cache is known as the Temporary Internet Files folder, but is still a folder of files saved from each site you visit to speed up your next visit to that site. Remove these instantly by clicking on 'Delete Files'.



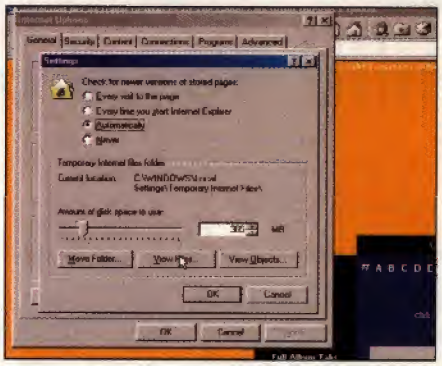
6 Delete offline content

Before the great purge, you'll be asked if you want to delete offline files stored on your hard drive. As we want to remove all evidence of our browsing habits, tick on the box to do this, then click on 'OK'.



7 A different folder

One way to flummox anyone trying to pry is to move the Temporary Internet Folders. To do this, click on the 'Settings' button, then choose 'Move folder'. Having done this, you can browse your hard drive for somewhere new to store the folder.



8 Removing files

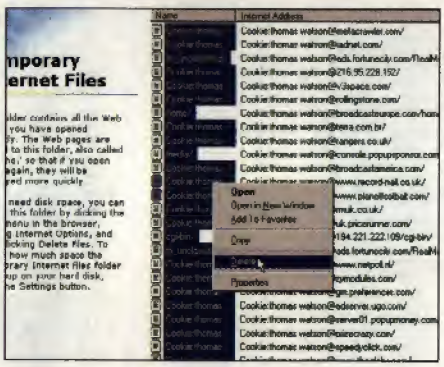
Even though we've chosen to delete our temporary Internet files, some will still be left on your hard drive. To access these, click on 'Settings' and then 'View files'. This will show you the files remaining in the Temporary Internet Files folder.

JARGON BUSTER

Cookie
A cookie is a tiny text file sent to your browser by some sites to identify you and your preferences the next time you visit.

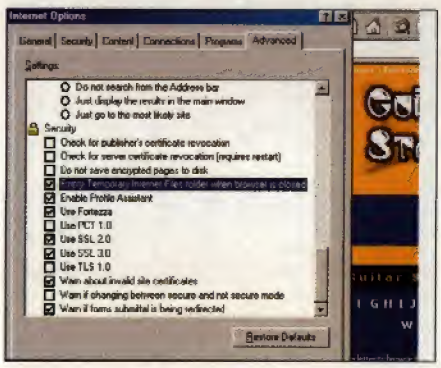
Cache
Cache refers to the files that your PC needs to download in order to bring up each page you go to on the Net. The cache folder, which is stored on your hard drive, is known as the Temporary Internet Files folder in Internet Explorer.

History
A collection of links that shows which Web sites you've visited recently. This selection of links can be viewed from within IE.



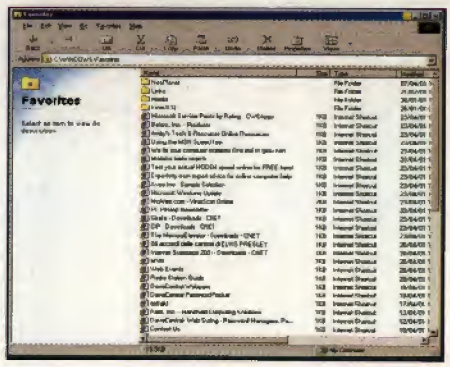
9 Delete the cookies

The files that remain are more than likely to be cookies, which help to point towards places you've visited. Select all of them, and then simply press the 'DELETE' button on your keyboard to remove them from your hard drive.



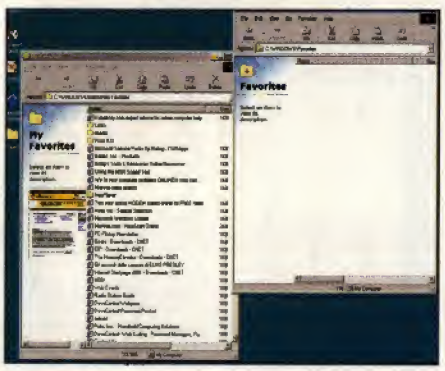
10 Advanced cache options

To save doing this every time you use Internet Explorer, why not set the program to do it for you? In the Internet Options box, click the 'Advanced' tab. Move down the list, and tick the 'Empty Temporary Internet Files folder when browser is closed'.



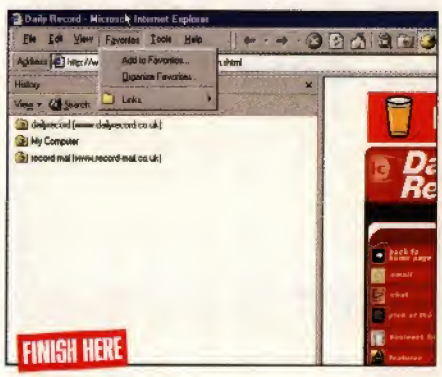
11 Finding your Favorites

Press 'OK', and close down IE for the time being. Rather than use the program to organise our Favorites, it's easier to do it using Windows. Open the Favorites folder on your hard drive, which is located at 'C:\Windows\Favorites'.



12 Copying to another folder

You can save your Favorites onto a floppy. To transfer them to another folder, create a new folder and open it. Go into the Favorites folder, select all, right-click on the list, and choose 'Cut'. In your new folder, right-click and choose 'Paste'.



13 Secret browsing

Now, open Internet Explorer again, and you'll notice that the History, Temporary Internet Files, and Favorites folder have all been thoroughly cleaned out and emptied. If you follow the rules above, you need never worry about being caught out again.

CONCLUSION

By progressing through this tutorial, we have gone from having a browser riddled with holes that let other users to snoop on our every Net habit, to being the proud owner of a veritable fortress. After you've followed the 13 steps here, anyone using your PC who feels like snooping to see what sites you've visited will find that the History folder is completely empty. This also means that the Address Bar autocomplete function is cleared as well. We've also removed every Temporary Internet File stored, including cookies. What's more, even the Favorites folder is now stored in a secret place that only you can access. In short, no-one would even know that you'd been using IE, let alone be able to figure out which sites you had visited while you were connected.

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Discover online voice chatting

PROJECT 2
TUTORIAL

How to: Sign up for a free Yahoo! voice chat account and then talk in real-time over the Internet

THE CONCEPT OF Internet chatting has evolved quickly. Until very recently, everyone was happy to type all of their messages in chat rooms, but this always proved cumbersome at best.

Yahoo! is one of several chat providers who've cottoned on to this, and now offer you real-time voice chatting in the standard chat room style. This lets you join up to a chat room, and converse in the traditional text format, or by using your voice. All you need is a microphone and a set of speakers or headphones, and you can talk to anyone you meet as if you were on the telephone.

Apart from the fact that it's a far easier way for people to talk in chat rooms, this is also a great way of talking to your friends, without having to resort to picking up the phone. If you've got a freephone connection at home, this is the perfect way to save money.

What's more, it is remarkably easy to use, and you'll find yourself fully conversant in the voice chat lingo in no time at all.

START HERE

1 Get a Yahoo ID

Install Yahoo! Messenger from our cover CD and run it – view the tour if you wish. In the 'Login' box which appears asking for a username and password, enter your details. If you don't have a Yahoo! account already, click on the 'Get a Yahoo! ID' button.

2 Signing up

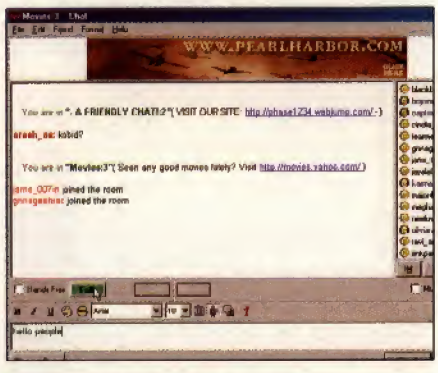
Enter your details where required (including the five digit 'Zip code' which you'll have to make up). Choose a username from the list you're given, or make up your own, enter a password, then you're ready. Press the 'Login' button in the login box.

3 Press Chat

This brings up the main Yahoo! interface, where you see your list of friends (empty at the moment). The best way to get into Yahoo! is to chat, so let's do that. Click on the 'Chat' button in the main toolbar.

4 Choosing a room

The rooms selection box features a standard Explorer-type interface, so click on the folders to view a list of individual rooms within that section. Each section has both Yahoo! and user-created rooms. To go to one, double-click on it in the list.



5 Chatting in a room

When you get into the room, you'll see a list of everyone in there on the right-hand side of the page. You can type a message at the bottom, or if you want to speak, click on the green 'Talk button.

6 Sending an instant message

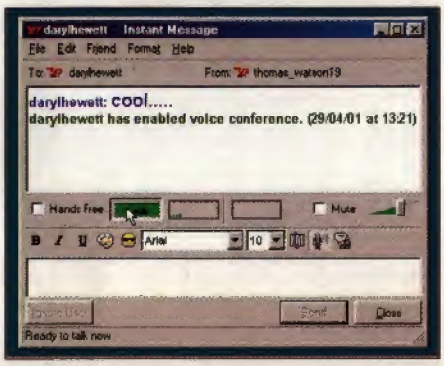
To send an instant message to someone in the room, you can either double-click on their name, or right-click and choose 'Send a message'. Type your message in the box, then click on 'Send' or press 'return' on the keyboard.

7 Messaging a friend

Talking to strangers loses its appeal pretty quickly, so let's message a friend. For this, you nedd to know their Yahoo! username. Go to the main interface again, and click on the 'Message' icon. Enter your friends user name in the 'To' field, then type your message.

8 Add them to your friends list

To add your friend to your 'Friends' list, and make contacting them much easier, select 'Friends', 'Add as Friend'. In the box that appears, you can enter a message to be sent to your friend, along with the request to add them to your list.



9 Talking to your friend

Messaging is all well and good, but we want to speak. There are three ways of talking to your friend. Firstly, just click on the microphone icon in the message box where you've been typing, and this will enable voice chat in here. Press the 'talk' button to speak.

10 Voice conferencing

A voice conference allows more than two people to talk in a room. To start this, select 'Friends', 'Invite to conference', then select the friends you'd like to invite. Again, in this room, click on the mic icon to enable voice.

TOP TIP!

Ignore at your peril

Whether you chat using Yahoo! Messenger, or by visiting www.yahoo.com, one of the most fundamentally important things you should learn is the 'Ignore' button. You access this by right-clicking on someone's name in the room list on the right, and selecting 'Ignore user'. Unless you have a bizarre masochistic desire to listen to 16-year-old American boys saying 'Wassssssup!' repeatedly, this will make your chatting life substantially easier. And don't worry – the person in question can't see that you're ignoring them – occasionally Yahoo! will say that x amount of people are ignoring a person. Spend five minutes in Yahoo!, and you'll realise the importance of the Ignore button.

11 Create another room

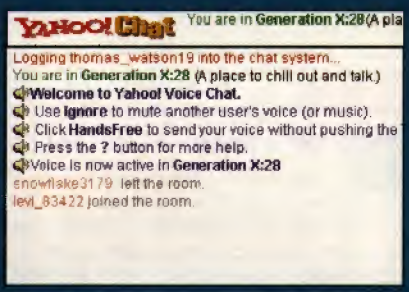
Another way of chatting is to create a room of your own. To do this, click on the 'Chat' icon again, then select 'Create a room'. You can make this room private, so that only people you invite can enter. Invite people in the same way as before, and chatting is just the same.

THE QUICK METHOD
USING YAHOO! CHAT

YAHOO! MESSENGER ALLOWS you to get the most out of voice chatting, but if you want to see how it all works quickly and easily, pop along to **www.yahoo.com**, and follow these simple steps. You won't get anywhere near the same level of features, but this will give you an introduction to the world of voice chatting.

Get a Yahoo! account

Go to **www.yahoo.com**, and select 'Chat' from here. On the 'Login' screen, select 'Sign up for Yahoo! chat', and enter user information and a password. This will eventually take you back to the same screen, where you can log in.



Logon to chat

Enter your username and password, and you'll be taken to Yahoo! chat. Click on 'Start chatting', then wait for the chat applet to load (you might be asked to download it). Once this is done, you're in the chat, which looks like this.

Change room/talking

To go to another room, click on 'Change room', then browse through the rooms until you see one that takes your fancy. You can type your messages along the bottom, or click on the green 'talk' button to speak out loud.

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Use Outlook Express email filters

PROJECT 3
TUTORIAL

How to: Tweak and tune-up Outlook Express to get the most out of the program

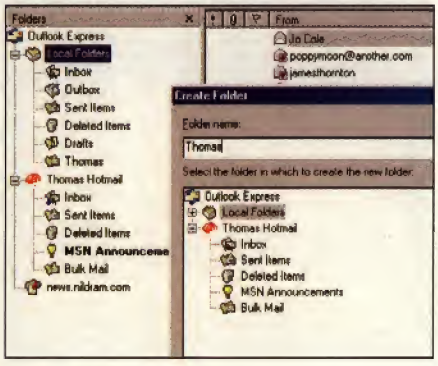
AS IT COMES installed on all new PCs as standard, Outlook Express is used by the vast majority of Internet users as their default email program. Surprisingly, though, many people are content to amble along with preconfigured settings and options, and don't realise that ten minutes here or there can transform Outlook Express completely.

That's why we're giving you THREE different mini-tutorials on Microsoft's email client this month. Over the next three pages, we'll show you how to set up folders and message rules, create an auto-replying message, and pick up your work email at home.

Many of you share a PC with the family, and this can lead to a tremendously messy Inbox, full of messages from all over the place. First up, we're going to show you how to create a new folder, and automatically redirect new emails into this. Then, you can follow our steps to create an auto-reply rule, which will send a message to every email that arrives.

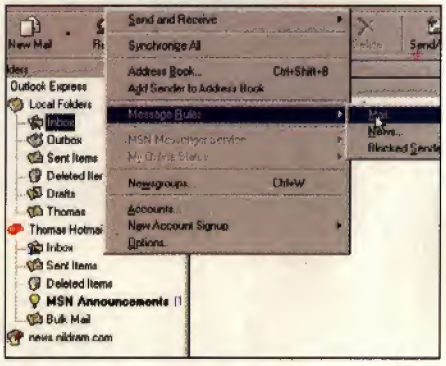
1 Add a folder

When you open Outlook Express, you'll see the standard folders on the left of the screen. Before anything else, create a new folder to store your messages in. Right-click on the 'Local Folders' icon and select 'New Folder'.



2 Your folder

Give your folder a name (we've called ours 'Thomas Received'), then click 'OK'. When you've done this, you'll see your new folder on the left-hand side, with the others. Now that we've created a folder, we can start sorting out rules for it.



3 Making up the rules

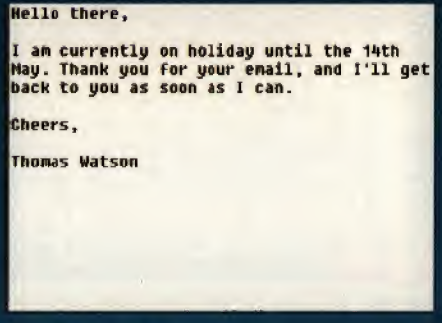
To make rules for messages to follow, you first go to 'Tools', 'Message Rules', then 'Mail'. This takes you into the Message Rules options box, where you can start to automatically move messages into folders as soon as they arrive.

CREATE AN AUTO-REPLY RULE

ALTHOUGH RECEIVING EMAILS is always a pleasant experience, there are times when it's impossible to pick up your email, let alone reply to it. Whether you're on holiday, or on business, it can be most inconvenient to have to wait for two weeks or so to tell people that you can't reply to them.

Thankfully, Outlook Express has a set of message rules designed for this purpose. The 'auto-reply' function allows you to automatically send a message to anyone who has sent a message to you. It works using the same principles as above, in that you create a rule which tells Outlook Express to respond to 'all messages', auto-replying with a text message we'll create. This ensures that everyone who sends you an email receives confirmation that you are away, and that you will reply when you get back.

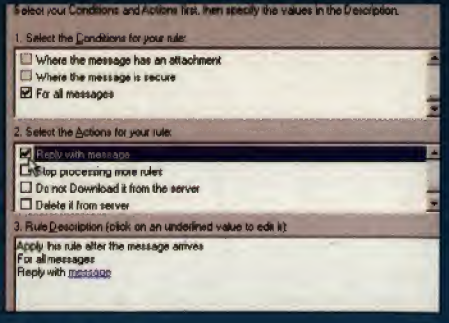
But remember to turn your auto-reply rule off when you return, or else your friends will all be inundated with 'sorry, I'm away' messages.



```
Hello there,

I am currently on holiday until the 14th
May. Thank you for your email, and I'll get
back to you as soon as I can.

Cheers,

Thomas Watson
```

Create a text message

First up, you have to create a text only file with your message. We've used 'Notepad' to do this, as it comes as standard on every PC, but you can use any word processing package, as long as you save it as '.txt'.



The first rule

Next, go to the Message Rules options box, as shown above, then move down the first list at the top, and tick 'For all messages'. In the second list of 'Actions', move down until you find 'Reply with message'

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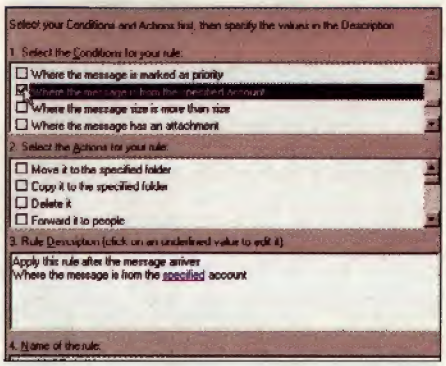
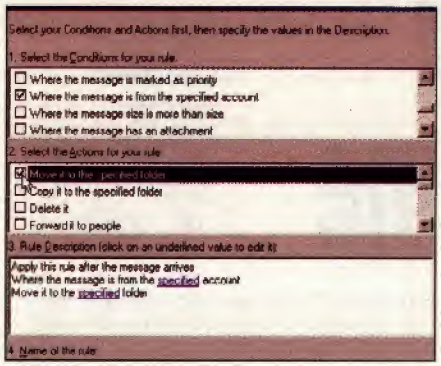


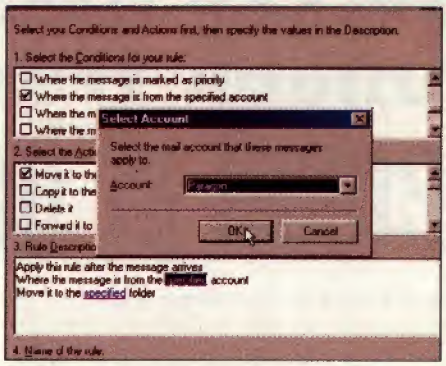
4 Setting the rules

This is the 'Rules Conditions' box, where you can set your rules up. In the first section at the top, scroll down to 'Where the message is from the specified account, and tick it. This instructs Outlook to look for message from an account.



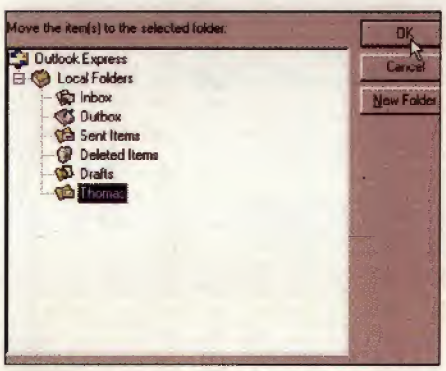
5 More rules

In the second section, tick the 'Move to the specified folder' box. You'll see that there are two blue links below this, with the word 'specified' underlined. This means Outlook Express is waiting for you to specify them.



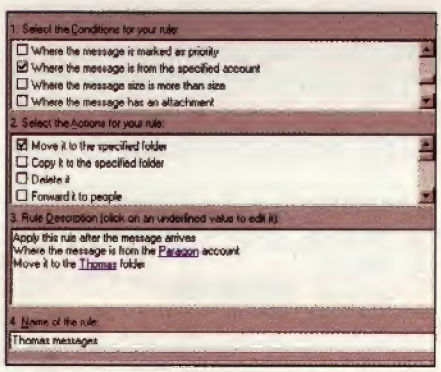
6 Specify an account

Click on the first 'specified' to tell which account to look for. This will bring up a screen listing all of the email accounts currently configured on your computer. Move down these until you find the email account for the person whose folder you've created.



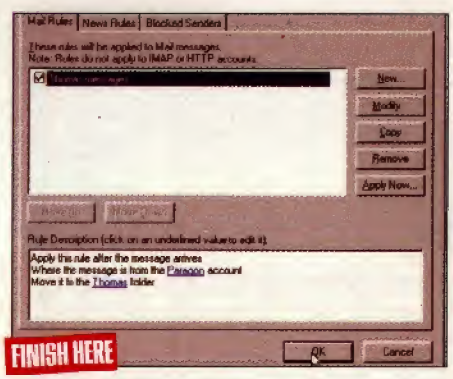
7 Specify a folder

Now click on the 'specified' in the second line to define the folder to send to. In this next screen, select your newly created folder, then select 'OK'. You've now created the basics of your first rule.



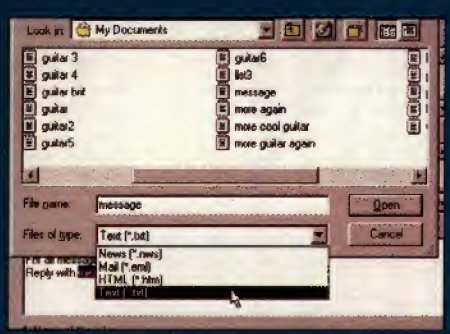
8 Give it a name

All you need do now is give your rule a name. You probably won't need to use this name very often, as it will run in the background, but it helps for when you need to edit it again.



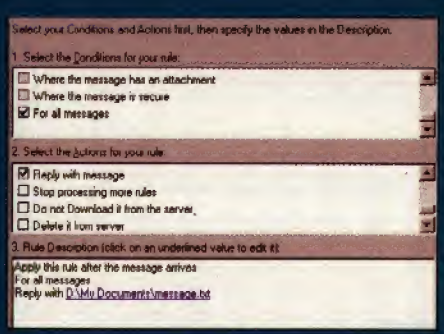
9 Apply the rule

Tick 'OK' in this confirmation screen to apply your new rule to Outlook Express. Emails to that account will be transferred into your new folder automatically. If you follow the above steps, you can create more folders for more email accounts.



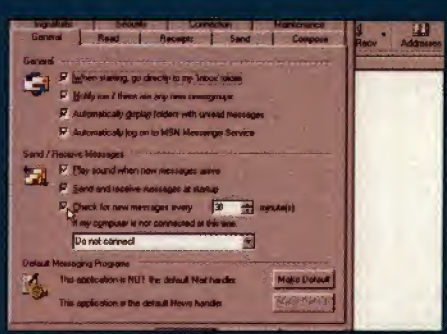
Browse for message

Click on the blue 'message' link, and browse your hard drive for the message file we created. Make sure you move the 'Files of type' selector to 'Text', then select your message, and choose 'Open'.



Apply rule

Give your rule a name, then click on 'OK'. Now, whenever anyone sends you an email, Outlook Express will automatically reply to them with this message.



Auto-check

Now, we want to make sure that Outlook Express will check for new mail automatically. Go to 'Tools', 'Options', then under the 'General' tab, make sure the 'Check for new messages' box is ticked, and set a time value.

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Check work email at home

How to: Configure Outlook Express to pick up email from any account

IF YOU HAVE an email address at work, the chances are that this is a much busier account than any you have at home. Should you find yourself out of the office for a prolonged period, those emails will quickly pile up, meaning you have a lot of messages to sort through. Don't worry, though, because setting up Outlook Express to collect your work emails from home is a doddle.

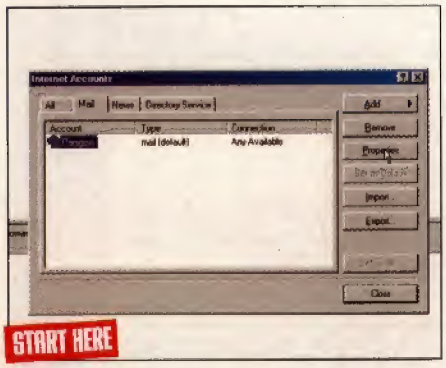
You should, however, note a couple of things beforehand. Firstly, if your company has a firewall on its systems, you're going to find it nigh impossible to get any information from it remotely. Secondly, because you are connecting to the servers from outside, you can only check incoming mails. You can't write new mails to anyone.

In effect, checking for mail from work is the same as checking for any other type of account. All we are really doing is taking the account details from one machine, and entering them into another PC.

JARGON BUSTER

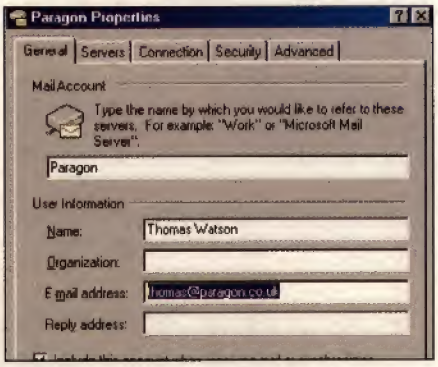
POP3
The standard method of email in Outlook Express, Post Office Protocol 3 allows you to access your emails, and download them onto your computer. This is ideal for reading your messages offline, without having to worry about phone bills.

SMTP
This is the method Outlook Express uses to send your messages – Simple Mail Transfer Protocol. While this proves ideal for writing your emails, take note that this method also ensures that you can only send an email from an account using their server.



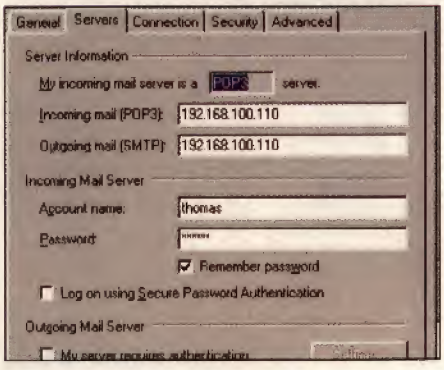
1 Your work account details

At work, open up your email program (we're using Outlook Express here), and go to your account properties by choosing 'Tools' then 'Accounts'. Click on the 'Mail' tab, then choose 'Properties' for your email account.



2 Account properties

On this first properties screen, take note of your email address for copying into your Outlook Express at home. Once you've done this, click on the 'Server' tab to bring up the more detailed info about your account.

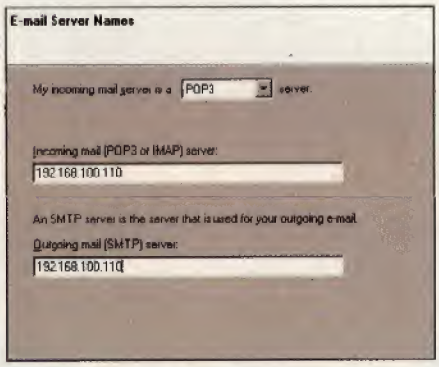


3 Server information

Note your incoming and outgoing mail addresses, also known as POP3 and SMTP, and your account name and password. Once you've done that, you're ready to configure your home PC to accept your work emails.

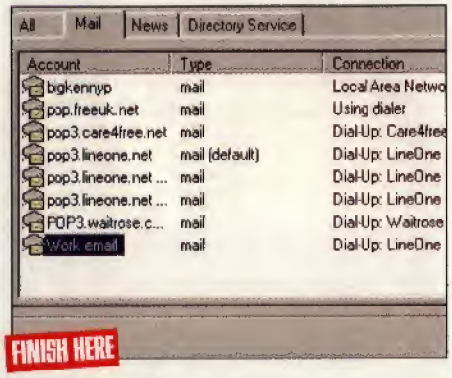
4 Back at home...

On your home machine, go to 'Tools', 'Accounts', then select 'Add' and 'Mail'. This takes you to the account wizard, where you can add account information. First up, type your name, then the email address of your work account.



5 Server information

On the next screen, you are asked to enter your account server details, which we took note of in work. First, choose which kind of mail server you have (it's probably POP3), then enter your incoming and outgoing server details.



6 Finally...

After you've entered your username and password, click on 'Finish', and your work account will be listed alongside other accounts on your machine. Rename it to 'work email' to make it more easily recognised, and then check for mail whenever you want.

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Speed up your browsing

PROJECT 4
TUTORIAL

on the CD

You can find Memory Elevator on this month's cover CD

How to: Assign more RAM to Internet Explorer using Memory Elevator on our CD

ONE OF OUR abiding goals is to make the Net work better and faster for you. We've dedicated pages to showing how to boost your modem speed, cut down Internet clutter and generally improve the efficiency of your time online.

One program which can help you boost Internet Explorer is Memory Elevator. It works on the principle that Windows uses all of your RAM as cache, meaning that prolonged Internet browsing, where the cache grows steadily, causes more and more of your system resources to be automatically tied up.

Memory Elevator allows you to free up RAM from the cache, so more memory can be assigned to Internet Explorer. You can set the program to work automatically, telling it to free up RAM whenever a certain memory level is reached, or you can hit the 'free' button when you desire a RAM boost. Memory Elevator works best with PCs holding over 64Mb of RAM, but can be used with other machines as well.

START HERE

1 Open Memory Elevator

Once you've installed Memory Elevator, go to the 'Start' menu, and open the program from there. This is the only time you'll have to open it up manually, as Memory Elevator is configured by default to open on startup.

2 Free memory

In the Memory Elevator window, you'll see a figure telling you how much free RAM you have at the present moment. Beneath this is a smaller figure, which you can adjust, to set the RAM to a higher figure. Press the 'FREE' button to do this.

3 Auto setup

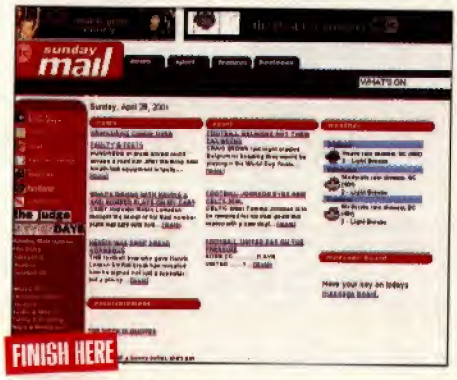
Having to manually free up RAM every time you want a boost in performance can quickly becoming tiresome, so thankfully there's a handy 'Auto Setup' option in Memory Elevator. Access this by clicking on the 'A' button in the interface.

4 Setting the values

This automatic mode of operation frees up RAM whenever things get to a critical point on your PC. Although you can set your own values, we suggest clicking on the 'Default values' button to make life easier. Close this window down.

5 Minimise Memory Elavator

Now that we've configured Memory Elevator to work the way we want it to, you can send it to the system tray in the bottom-right of the screen. Do this by clicking on the 'H' icon.



FINISH HERE

6 Use the Net

With Memory Elevator running in the background, automatically calculating and adjusting your RAM for optimum performance, you can now get on with the job of browsing the Net. You should notice an improvement in speed over time.

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Take control of your downloads

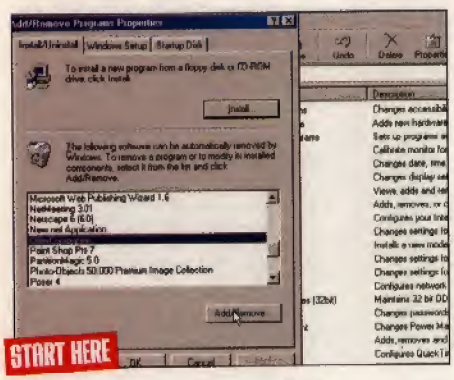
PROJECT 5
TUTORIAL

How to: Manage your downloads using Go!Zilla, ensuring that you don't suffer from broken links again

You can find Go!Zilla on this month's Practical Internet CD

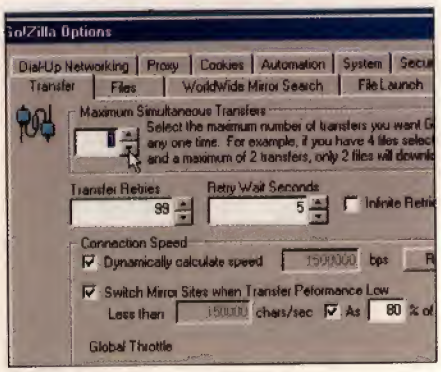
EVERYONE HAS SUFFERED at the hands of nightmare downloads in their time. You know that sinking feeling – you wait ages for that all important file to download, only for it to die at the last minute, leaving you stranded with absolutely nothing.

You can eliminate the possibility of this happening by installing a download manager. By far our favourite of these programs is Go!Zilla, which has a wide range of functions to sort you out. Once you've set up Go!Zilla to run the way you want it to, you'll be able to schedule your downloads to happen when you want them to. This is especially valuable if you have an unmetered connection, and don't want to waste time waiting on things downloading. Instead, you leave Go!Zilla to do all of your downloads while you're out. More than anything, though, Go!Zilla allows you to resume broken downloads, or pause them whenever you choose.



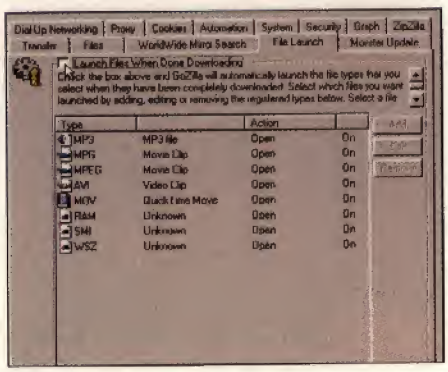
1 Cutting out the chaff

After you've installed Go!Zilla, the first step isn't to open the program, but to get rid of the Gator and OfferCompanion programs installed with it. Do this by choosing 'Add/Remove Programs' in the Control Panel and double-clicking on each in turn to remove them.



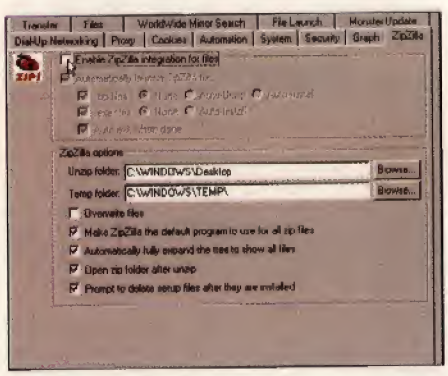
2 One download at a time

If you're using a modem, it's an idea to make sure that Go!Zilla only ever tries to download one item at a time. To do this, open the program up, and choose 'Go', 'Options'. In the 'Transfer' tab, set the simultaneous downloads figure to one.



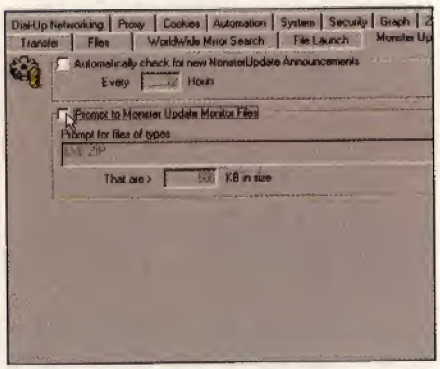
3 Auto file opening off

Next up, we'll turn off the auto file launch option, which sets files in action as soon as they've finished downloading. This proves to be a hindrance eventually. Click on the 'File Launch' tab, then untick the 'launch files box' at the top.



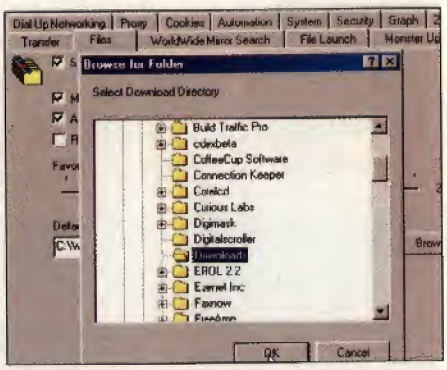
4 ZipZilla off

Likewise, the integration of Go!Zilla with your Zip files will prove to be very annoying in the long run, so let's turn that option off as well. Click the 'ZipZilla' tab, then untick the 'enable zipzilla' box towards the top of the page.



5 Getting rid of updates

Probably the most irritating thing of all, though, is the 'update box' that just appears at random. This gives you the latest info on Go!Zilla, but is nothing more than an advert. Turn this off by clicking on the 'Monster update' tab, then unticking the two boxes as shown above.



6 Create a download folder

Ensure your downloads are saved to a specific folder by clicking on the 'Files' tab, then choosing 'Browse'. This will let you set a folder on your hard drive to save your Go!Zilla downloads. Once you've done this, click 'OK' in the 'Options' box to go back to the main interface.

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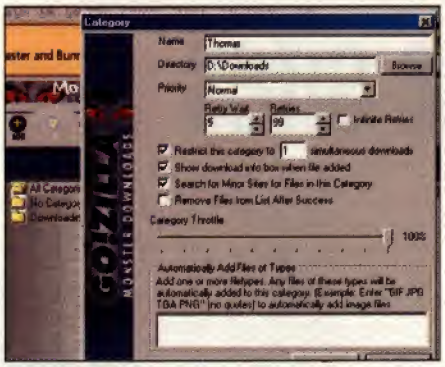
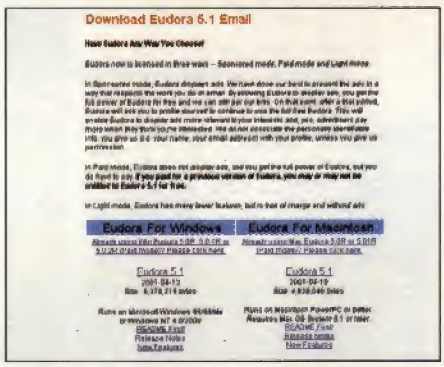


7 Create a category

To add your own Go!Zilla folder, click on 'Category' then 'Add Category'. Give your new folder a name, and make sure you tick the 'restrict this category to one simultaneous download' box. Click 'OK', and you will see your folder in the main interface.

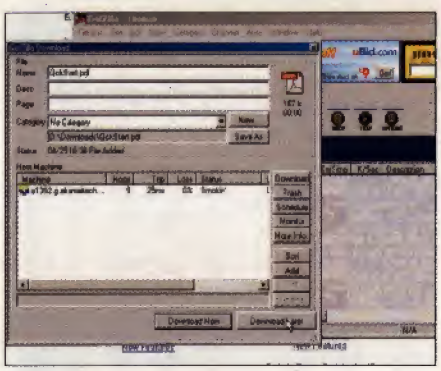
8 Drag and drop

When you see a file you want to download, right-click on the link and choose 'Copy shortcut'. Go into the main Go!Zilla interface again, and paste this link into the program by right-clicking and choosing 'Paste File'.



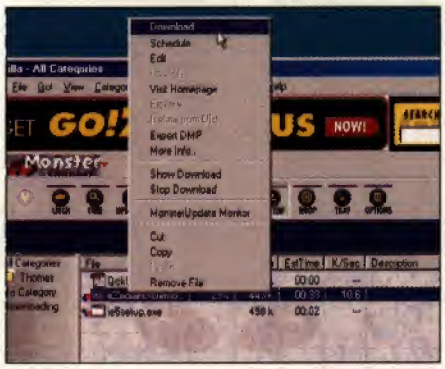
9 Download later

As soon as the download file is entered in Go!Zilla, you'll be presented with this option screen. This shows you how speedy the response from the download site is, but also gives you the opportunity to either download now or later. Choose 'Later' for the moment.



10 Drop target

Another, possibly easier, way of adding downloads to your list is to click on the 'Drop target' icon in the main Go!Zilla interface. This creates a small icon in your browser – to add a download, just drag the link into this.



11 Starting downloads

When you've got a list of files that you want to download, select those you wish to save at the moment by using CTRL and the left mouse button. After you've selected all the ones you want, press on 'CTRL' + 'D' to start downloading them.

12 Downloading

This is the download screen. Here you can pause your download at any point, and see how far it has progressed. You can also pick up a broken download here, or just watch until the speedometer type thing reaches the end, meaning your download is complete.

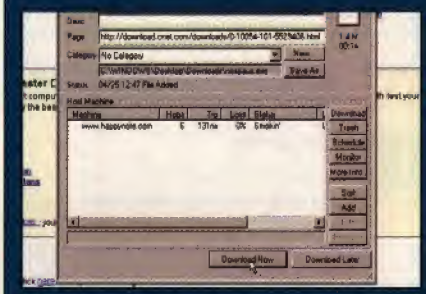
THE QUICK METHOD FOR INSTANT RESULTS

IF YOU FOLLOW our 12 steps opposite, you'll quickly find out how to get the very best out of Go!Zilla. However, the impatient readers out there will no doubt want an instant idea of how the program works, so here's an overview of how to use Go!Zilla in minutes.

Shut Go!Zilla down

After you've installed Go!Zilla from our cover CD-ROM, shut the program down, and start browsing the Net. The download manager will automatically kick into action when you try to save a file from the Web, so click on a link to download to your PC.

Download now



As soon as you click on the download link, Go!Zilla will start up, and will display a dialog box asking you when to download the file. We want to do it now, so click on the button to 'Download now'. The download will start.

The download

This brings up the download screen, where you can follow the progress of your download. You can also pause, stop and restart after failures, so that you never need to suffer from broken downloads again. When the file has finished, go to the Go!Zilla downloads folder to access it.

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Shortcuts to your favourite sites

How to: Generate keyboard shortcuts to sites and programs using WebKey

PROJECT 6
TUTORIAL

on the CD

You'll find WebKey on this month's Practical Internet CD-ROM

ACCESSING YOUR FAVOURITE sites has never been as easy as it should be. You've got to open up Internet Explorer manually, go down the Favorites list until you find the correct URL, then select it. Then, and only then, are you privileged to view your chosen site.

WebKey aims to shelve this tardy and unnecessarily cumbersome selection method. It helps you create shortcuts to any number of your favourite sites, making them accessible with just a single key press on the keyboard. Apart from saving you valuable time and effort, this also introduces you to the world of keyboard shortcuts, which can lead to vast improvements in the way you browse the Web.

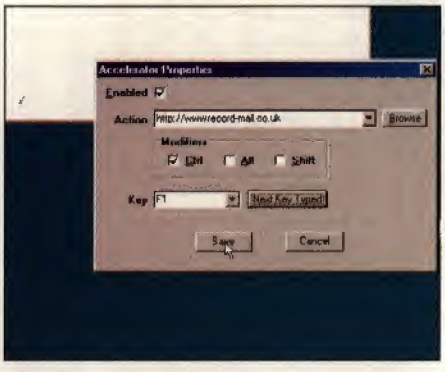
You can do a whole lot more in WebKey, though, including setting up shortcuts to any program or file on your PC. This can make a tremendous difference to your entire PC experience, saving valuable time and effort. We'll also show you how to boot up your email client with a single touch as well.

1 Start it up

After you've installed WebKey, start the program up. You'll notice quickly that the interface is nothing to write home about, but there are plenty of features here. Double-click on the blank link to edit it.

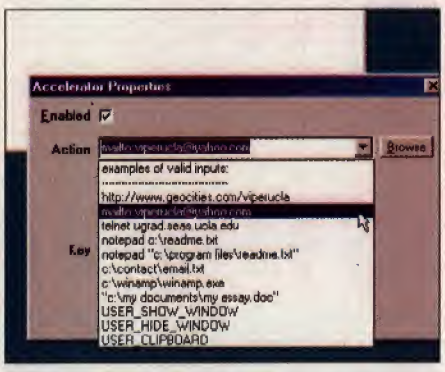
2 Enter a URL

In the space provided, enter the URL of the site you'd like to link to, making sure that you keep the 'http://' part in place. This means that Internet Explorer will launch, with this site, when you press the shortcut key we're about to set.



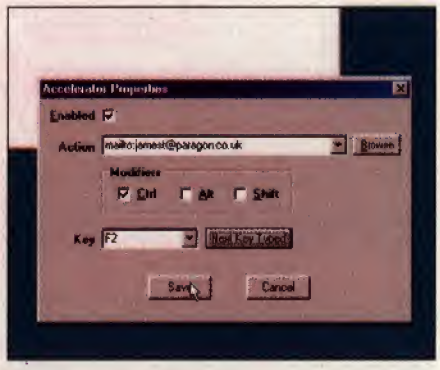
3 A shortcut key

Tick any of the 'shift', 'alt' or 'CTRL' boxes to signify which of these buttons should be pressed along with your main key. Then press the 'Next Key Typed' box, and press the key you wish to use. Press 'Save'.



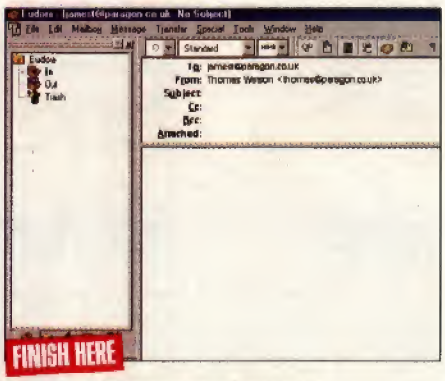
4 Adding another link

To add another shortcut, right-click anywhere in the WebKey interface, and select 'Add'. In this box, move the 'Action' selector down to the second option, the 'mailto' function. This lets us tell our default program to open up.



5 More shortcuts

Change the 'mailto' address from the WebKey one to an email address of your choice. Once you've done that, use the same method as before to create a keyboard shortcut for your link. Click on 'Save' to store it, and then minimise WebKey.



6 Using your shortcuts

With WebKey safely tucked away in the System Tray, you can now get to work using your new shortcuts. Press either of the key combinations you set as a shortcut to launch the relevant program. You can add as many links as you choose by the same methods.

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View search results as thumbnails

How to: Turn humble search result links into thumbnail images using Girafa

PROJECT 7
TUTORIAL

You'll find Girafa on this month's Practical Internet CD-ROM

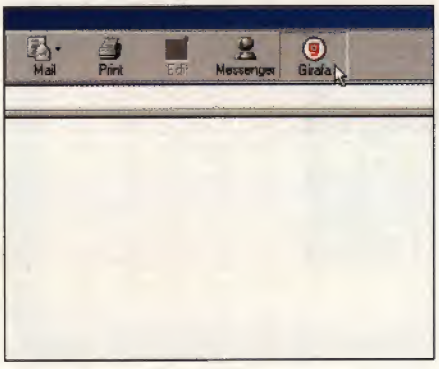
SEARCHING THE WEB is a forlorn affair at the best of times. You enter your keyword(s) in the relevant search engine, and then watch as you are presented with a huge list of text links. These text links are not only unhelpful at times, but they often lead to sites that haven't been touched since the Net began.

Girafa is nothing short of a godsend in this respect, for it lets you see thumbnail images of search results. This Internet Explorer add-on has a range of search engines built-in, so you only need to enter your chosen subject, and you're a click away from a visual representation. This helps the search process immensely, as it lets you see just what kind of site each link leads to. Even more fundamentally, you can see instantly whether the site is still on the go – meaning no more clicking on dead links for you.

What's more, each thumbnail has a menu, which lets you decide exactly how you want to view the link. This means you can keep your search results on the same pages at all times.

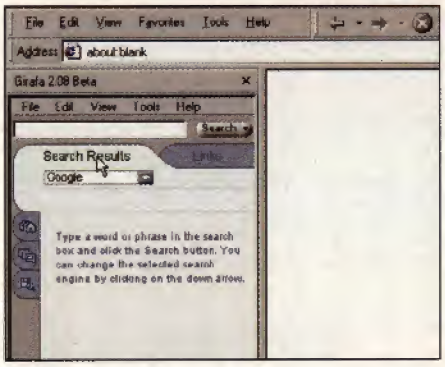
1 Register

When you run Girafa for the first time, you'll be asked to register the program. This doesn't take long, though, and only requires you to enter a username, password, email address and your country.



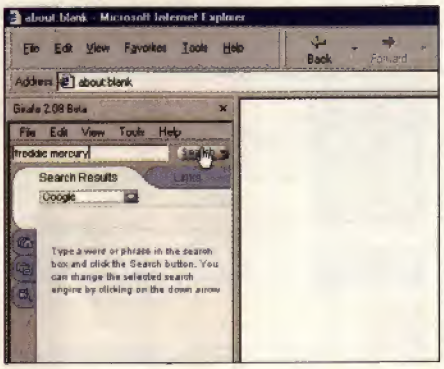
2 Accessing Girafa

If you turn your browser on, there is no Girafa bar on the left, you can turn this on via the Girafa toolbar icon, which sits alongside your other functions. In fact, you can use this to toggle Girafa on and off.



3 Search results

Although Girafa comes pre-installed with a collection of favourite sites, we want to get out of the default view of these. To do this, and go to the far more useful search thumbnails, click on the 'Search Results' tab at the top of the window.



4 Searching...

Girafa has a range of search engines built-in. Browse the list until you find the one you want, then enter your search word(s) in the text box. Click on the 'Search' button to the right of this to start the search.

5 Results

When your results appear, you'll be presented with a list of thumbnails in the Girafa bar. This gives you a visual view of each of the search results displayed in the main page to the right, without having to click on the link.

6 Choosing a link

You can browse through the thumbs by moving up and down, or by clicking on the 'Next' button to move to the next page of thumbs. Click on the relevant link, and it will be opened in the main window.

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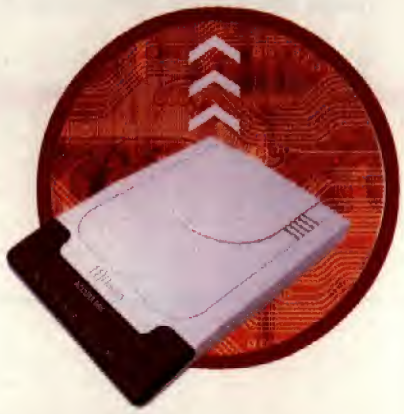
Claim 50Mb of free Web space

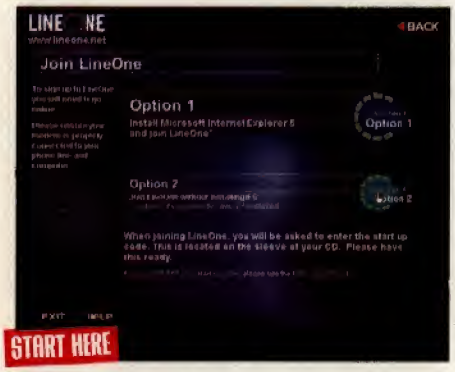
PROJECT 8
TUTORIAL

How to: Sign up for a LineOne account, and upload a site to your free Web space

THE EVER EXPANDING world of Web space means that it's now exceptionally easy to pick up megabytes of the stuff for absolutely nothing. While this is all well and good, many of the services you sign up to litter your site with an array of ad banners, turning it into a mess. What's more, your coveted Web address is often long and cumbersome, meaning that potential visitors have to sign up for a memory improvement course before they type in your URL.

That's why signing up to LineOne is so useful. Even if you have an ISP already, the range of services you can pick up by installing this LineOne on your hard drive are impressive (there's an installation disc on this issue's cover). As well as the speedy Internet connection, you can also pick up 50Mb of Web space just by registering with LineOne. Below, we show you how to sign up to the service, then download an FTP program, and upload your site to the Web.



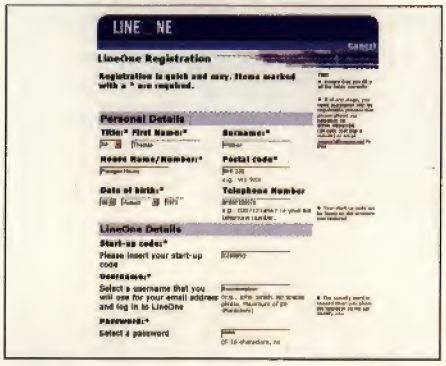


1 Insert the CD

Insert the LineOne CD into your PC. On the first screen, click on the icon that says 'Click here to join'. Next up, select one of the two installation options. If you have Internet Explorer 5 or above on your PC, click 'Option 1'. If not, click on 'Option 2'.

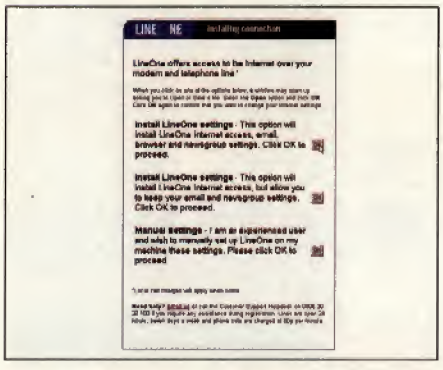
2 Connecting

This will set the Connection Wizard running, which connects your PC to the LineOne servers to allow you to sign up. Although you're signing up using a CD in your PC, the registration process is still done remotely.



3 Fill in the form

Next up, enter your details in the form, including a username and password. Remember to include the 'start-up' code that came with your LineOne disc. Once you've done this, and chosen a unique username, you'll be asked to confirm your details. Click 'Continue'.

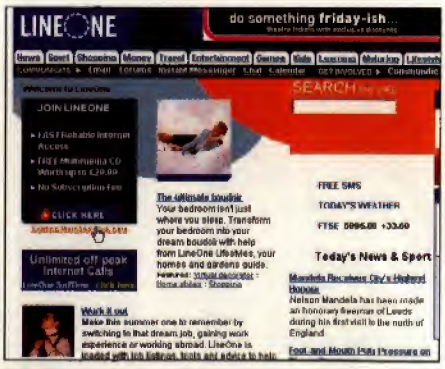


4 Automatic settings

If you're relatively new to the Internet world, click on the 'Yes' button to automatically configure your PC to connect to LineOne. If you want to keep control of your settings, click on the 'No' button to manually configure them yourself.

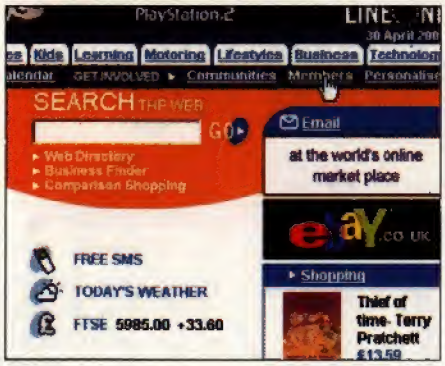
5 Connect to LineOne

Now that you've configured LineOne to run, you can connect to the service, sign into the members' section, and upload your Web site. First of all, go into 'My computer', 'Dial-up networking', then double-click on the LineOne connection.



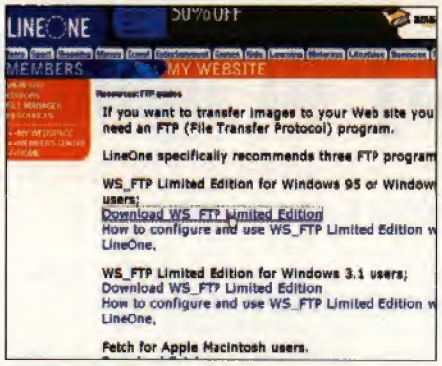
6 Members' login

Go to the LineOne Web site at **www.lineone.net** then click on the 'Members login' link on the home page. You'll be asked to enter your username and password. Type these in, then click on the 'Login' icon.



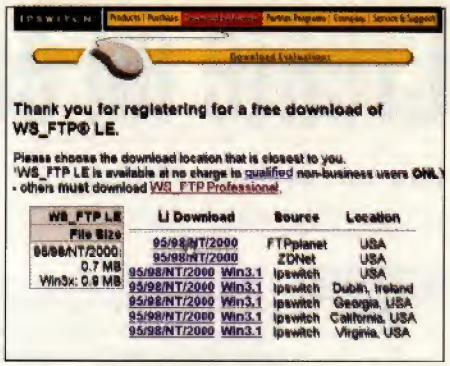
7 The members' section

You'll be taken back to the home page, so click on the 'Members' link to be taken to this part of the site. This is where you can access many of the extras given to you with your LineOne account. Click on 'MY WEBSITE'.



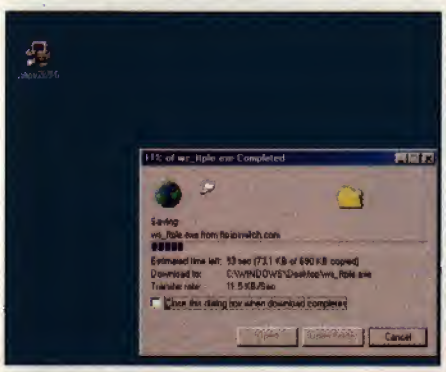
8 Choosing FTP software

Click on the 'FTP software' link on the next page, then choose 'WS_FTP LE' for your operating system. This lets you download the special free edition of this FTP program, which in turn lets you copy files from your PC to the Web.



9 Downloading WS_FTP

This takes you to the home page of Ipswitch, the makers of WS_FTP. To access the free download, click on the 'Download evaluations' icon, choose WS_FTP LE, then enter your information as requested. Click on the relevant link to download the program.

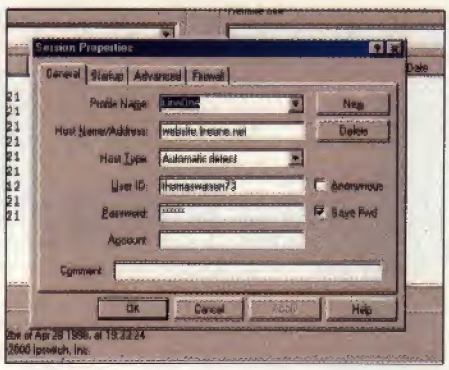


10 The download

After clicking on the link, the download will start automatically. The file is less than 500Kb, so it should only take a few minutes. Follow the progress of the download via the progress bar in the dialog box.

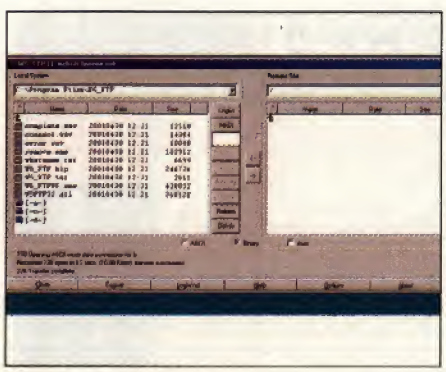
11 Install and run WS_FTP

Double-click on the installation file you've just downloaded. This will start WS_FTP LE installing to your hard drive. Once this has finished, go to the 'Start' menu, then choose 'Programs', 'WS_FTP LE' to open the program up.



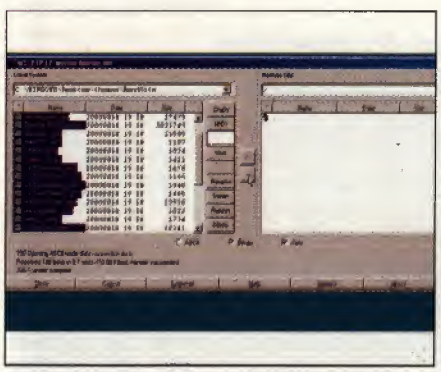
12 Create a new profile

When WS_FTP LE is up and running, click on 'New profile', and enter the details as shown above. The FTP address you need is 'website.lineone.net'. Enter your username (the part before '@lineone.net') and password in the space provided, and click 'OK'.



13 The interface

After you've entered your information, you should be connected to your LineOne Web space. The interface splits in two, with the files on your local (hard) drive on the left, and the files stored on your Web space on the right.



14 Uploading

Browse your hard drive to find the files you want to upload, then select them. Click on the arrow pointing to the right to copy these across. Because you are copying onto the Web, this might take a while, depending on how large your Web site.

15 Your Web site

Once the files have copied across, you will see your file list on the right. This means they have been uploaded, so wait an hour or so for your Web space to be updated then visit your own URL, which takes the form 'http://website.lineone.net/~[username]'.

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Create an easy-to-update Web log

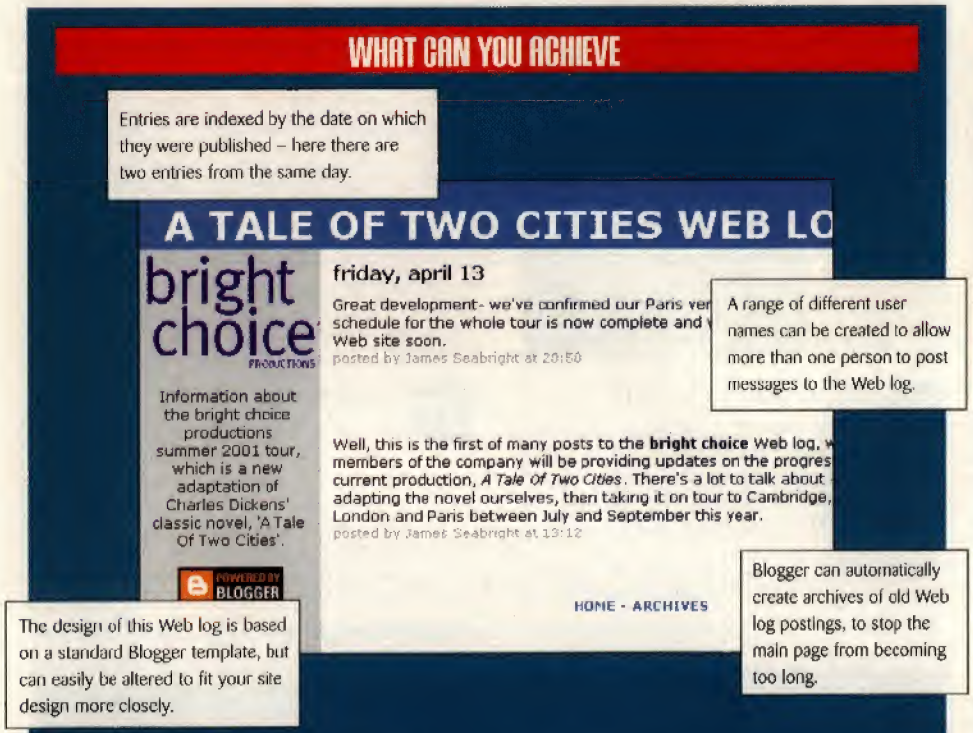
How to: Use the free Blogger service to create a Web log to fit the style of your existing site and allow you to modify it from any Web browser

PROJECT 9
TUTORIAL

AN INCREASINGLY COMMON part of a personal home page is a 'Web log'. This is basically the part of the site where the author makes a regular record of something.

Web logs have been built up around a whole host of different subjects. Most frequently, they take the shape of a personal journal explaining how the site author has been spending their days. Some site owners use Web logs to provide details of updates to their pages, others use them to publish information about a particular issue such as progress on a project or goal.

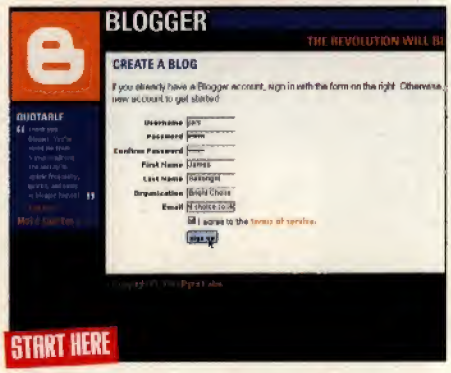
Whatever the subject matter of your site, the core idea of a Web log is that it is a forum for the rapid and regular addition of material to a Web site, normally accompanied by a time and date stamp. Creating one for your site is made a lot easier thanks to the Blogger service at **www.blogger.com**, which is explored in this tutorial.



AT FIRST GLANCE, Blogger can seem like a terribly complicated system that is impossible to master. In fact, it performs a fairly simple task, which is to help the Web site owner to put together one or more HTML pages that are then uploaded to their site in the normal way. It's important to remember that Blogger is not a free hosting service along the lines of Geocities; although it is possible to get your Web log hosted free of charge through the sister Blogspot service, this tutorial explains how to link Blogger's efforts into your existing Web page storage space.

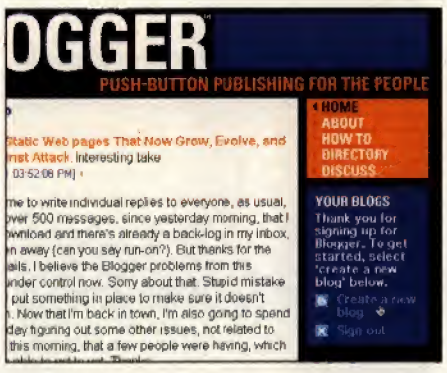
The beauty of the system is that once you have set it up, you can concentrate your efforts on providing interesting Web log entries rather than fussing over the details of designing the page or getting it online. A range of pre-designed templates are available, or you can fully customise the design by providing HTML code that matches your existing site design.

Blogger can then be configured to show a certain number of Web log entries on the main log page, and will archive older entries automatically if required. All of these configurations are achieved through the Web browser based interface, which also serves as the access point for adding new Web log items when required. These can include HTML code, making it possible to provide styled text and images within log entries if desired. All of these features are all explained in this tutorial.



1 Creating a Blogger account

Go to **www.blogger.com** and then click the 'Start Now' button at the top of the page. Fill in the form that appears with the requested details, and click the 'Sign Up' button. All being well, you will be returned to the main Blogger page again.



2 Create your first blog

The Blogger front page should now display a customised welcome message, under the heading 'Your Blogs'. This area of the page will also be blog access point in future visits. Click 'Create a New Blog' to create your first Web log.

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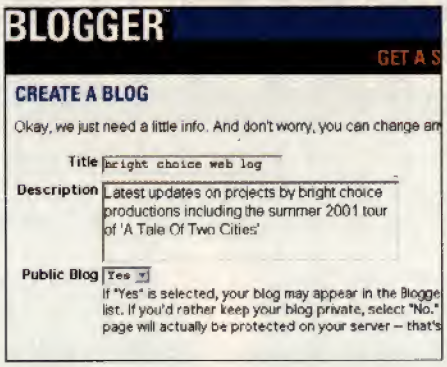


3 Entering your blog details

Keep the blog title short, as it will be the main page headline. The 'description' text may appear in Blogger's directory so it makes sense to take some care over it. Only select 'No' for 'Public Blog' if you're hell bent on secrecy! Click 'Next' to move on.

4 Blog storage method

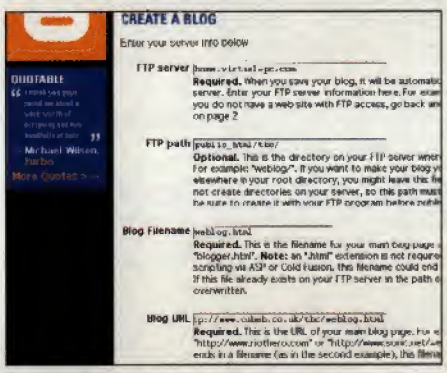
This tutorial is based around the 'FTP' method of storing your blog, which relies on you having an existing Web space provider who can host your Web log page. This makes it easier to integrate the blog with your existing Web site. Select 'FTP' and click 'Next'.

JARGON BUSTER

Web log
A Web page that is regularly updated with snippets of information on a particular topic, most commonly personal journal entries but quite often the basis for entire Web sites such as www.slashdot.org

Blogger
An online Web service which allows you to create a Web log, either as a standalone Web page or an addition to a site.

Blog
The shortened, affectionate term for 'Web log', around which Blogger's name is based. Although interchangeable with 'Web log', it suggests that the log is based on Blogger technology.

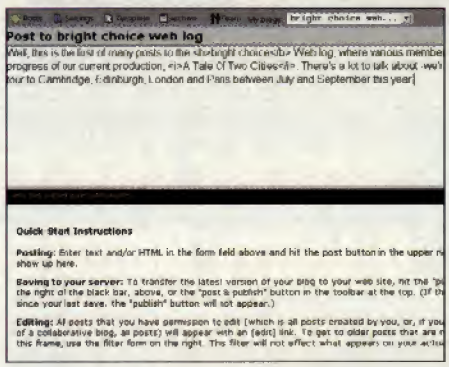


5 Providing FTP details

The first box requires the FTP server name, and the second is optional, allowing the use of folders if desired. Type a file name for the Web log into the third box; in the final box, provide the full Web address of the log based on that file name. Click 'Next'.

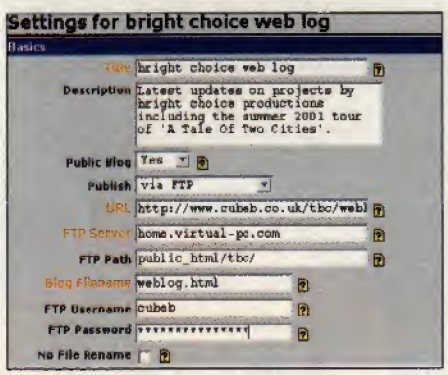
6 Selecting a design template

Pick one of the four design templates for your Web log. You can take a closer look by clicking on the design, which will make a window pop up with a larger preview. You can easily alter the template later by changing the HTML code. Click 'Finish'.



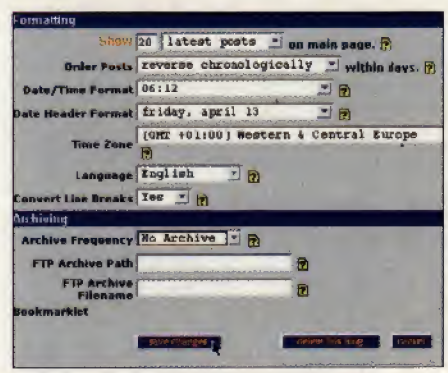
7 Entering your first Web log item

You will be asked to wait whilst the blog is created, and then a screen like the one above will appear. The empty top half of the display is where you type to make a blog entry. Type something in and then click 'Post' to see this in action.



8 Altering the blog settings

We'll now complete the configuration of the blog. Click 'Settings' in the top button bar and you'll see a screen like the one above. Enter the login name and password for your FTP server, which Blogger will require in order to publish your Web log.



9 Log entry options

The 'Formatting' section of settings allows you to alter the way that log entries are dated and sorted. If 'Convert Line Breaks' is set to 'No, then Blogger will not add
 (line break) tags to log entries. Click 'Save Changes' when you're satisfied with the settings.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Rebecca Mead
www.rebeccamead.com
This New Yorker journalist has published an online copy of her article about Web log culture from November 2000.

Joe Clark's Web Log Resources
www.fawny.org/resources.html
This site offers a few useful pages of resources for Web log owners, including pointers on how to get an ISSN for your Web log...

Slash
www.slashcode.com
An alternative service to Blogger, in case you'd prefer to take the road less travelled.

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• Web Forwarding	✓	×	×	×
• Unlimited FTP	×	✓	✓	✓
• Cgi-Bin	×	✓	✓	✓
• Site Statistics	×	✓	✓	✓
• MySQL PHP SSI	×	×	✓	✓

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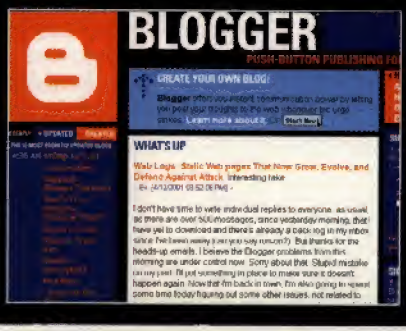
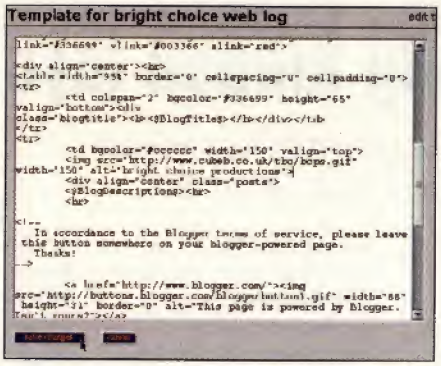
TOP TIP!

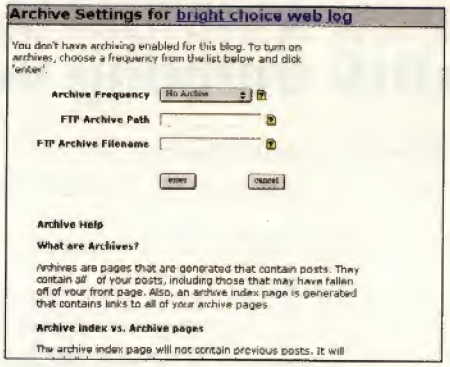
Take a look at what other people are doing with Web logs to get some ideas about how your site might benefit from having one. This is easily done by looking at the 'Recently Updated Blogs' section of the Blogger front page.





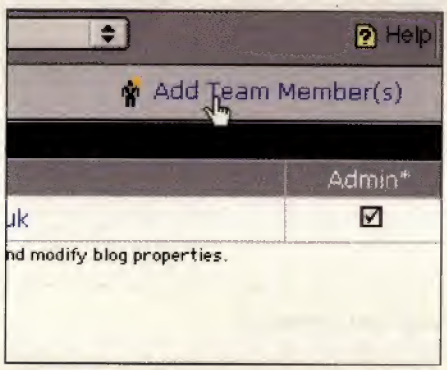
10 Web log design template

Click the 'Template' button to alter the HTML code for your Web log. Blogger adds log entries into the positions marked with the special dollar sign tags. You're free to alter everything else as desired. Click 'Save Changes' when you're done.



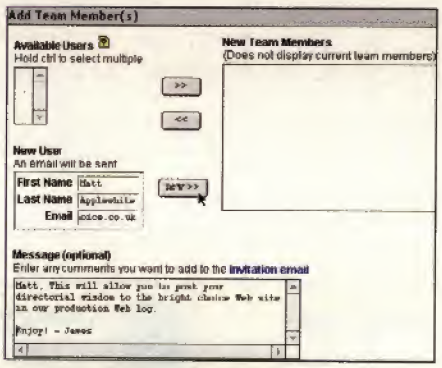
11 Creating an archive for posts

The 'Archive' button leads you to the page shown above. Use the options to have Blogger save your old Web log posts into archived pages, also be published to your Web server in the folder specified here. Click 'Enter' when you've altered the settings.



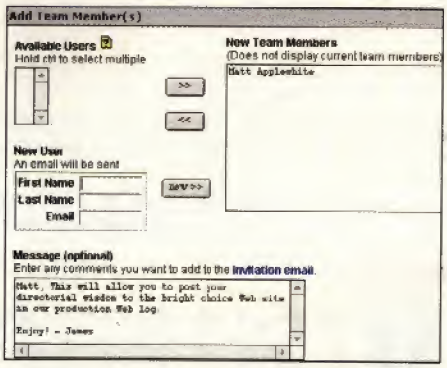
12 Making a team-based Web log

If there are other people who might have something worthwhile to add to the Web log, Blogger has a means to allow them to contribute but not alter the blog settings. Click the 'Team' button and then the 'Add Team Members' button to get started.



13 Specifying new team members

Complete the 'First Name', 'Last Name' and 'Email' boxes for each new user, clicking the 'New' button to transfer each into the list on the right-hand side of the screen. Type an invitation message in the box provided.

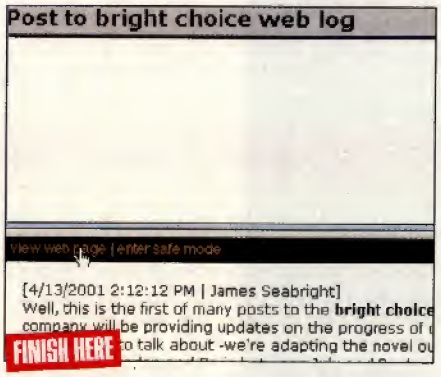


14 Inviting the new team members

When you've got all the new team members listed as required, and have an invitation message typed in, click 'Send Invites' to have those people emailed a message asking them to log on to Blogger. Then click 'Posts' to return to the main screen.

15 Publishing the blog

With your settings configured and your first entry in place, it's time to commit your blog to the Web for the first time. This is done by clicking the 'Publish' button in the middle section of the screen. Status messages will inform you of Blogger's progress.



16 Viewing the Web log online

Take a look at the online blog by clicking the 'View Web Page' link on the left of the screen. This will pop up a new browser window. Now link to the Web log page from your main site and blog to your heart's content!

CONCLUSION

Now your first Web log is up and running, hopefully you'll find it easier to make regular updates to your site. These can be done from any computer that has a Net-connected Web browser.

It makes sense to try and integrate the Web log design as closely as possible with your site, something that can be easily achieved through the careful replication of HTML code into the Blogger template. You can also use HTML when making Web log entries.

If you want to get a more complicated Web log up and running, then take a look at the Slash system available via **www.slashcode.com**. This is the software behind the entire site design of **www.slashdot.org** and has nigh-on limitless potential for customisation!

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Site building using hidden layers

How to: Create an entire site using just one HTML file and many layers, using a drop-down menu to select which one to view

HOME IMPROVEMENT

THERE ARE LOTS of reasons why it makes sense to reduce the number of HTML files that a user has to download in order to enjoy your Web site. One of the most obvious and important reasons is that they will appreciate not having to wait around every time they click a link. Even fast Internet connections can grind to a halt during busy periods. And if some of your users have a slow connection, slow download time may put them off your site altogether. This tutorial shows you how to build a site by using hidden layers on your Web page, which can be made visible individually by the user making a selection from a drop-down menu. The site that is designed through this tutorial is a real home page you can see for yourself at **www.jamesseabright.com**.

```
<html>
<head>
<title>hidden layers example</title>

<script language="JavaScript">
<!--

var current="welcome";

function linker(x) {
  if (document.layers != null) {
        thelayer = eval("document.layers['" + current + "']");
        thelayer = thelayer.visibility = "hide";
        current = x.options[x.selectedIndex].value;
        thelayer = eval("document.layers['" + current + "']");
        thelayer.visibility = ((thelayer.visibility = =
"show")?"hide":"show");
```

START HERE

1 Starting a new page and scripting for Netscape

Download the code template for this example from **http://hiddenlayers.jamesseabright.com** and save yourself a lot of typing. The code above combines the standard page furniture with part of the layer-handling script. The line starting 'var' specifies the name of the layer that is visible when the page is first loaded.

```
} else if (document.all != null) {
        eval(current + ".style").visibility = "hidden";
        current = x.options[x.selectedIndex].value;
        with(eval(current + ".style")) {
                visibility = ((visibility = =
"visible")?"hidden":"visible");
                }
        }
  }

// -->
</script>
</head>
```

2 Coding for compliant browsers

The chunk of code you see above looks after Internet Explorer users and other browsers that comply with the normal specification for layer control. The main difference between this and the Netscape method is that here we use document.all instead of document.layers as the access point to the layers, and that visibility is seen as a style property.

```
<body>

<form name="popup1">
<select name="themenu"
onChange="linker(this)">
<option selected
value="welcome">Welcome</option>
<option value="second">Second
section</option>
<option value="third">Third section</option>
</select>
</form>
```

3 Creating the drop down menu

The drop down menu that serves as the site navigation tool is based around the FORM tag that has its most common appliance in fill-in Web forms. It is a trigger device for the script we created in the first two steps of the tutorial. The 'onChange' property of the SELECT tag means that each time the user selects a different option from the menu, the 'linker' function will be called.

JARGON BUSTER

** tag**
A tag which is used to create a HTML layer. DIV tags can have style properties that set their position, visibility and a whole range of other behaviours as defined in the Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) specification (see **www.w3.org**).

Function
A section of JavaScript code which will only be used when it is specifically called or triggered. The brackets after its name can be used to specify input variables; in this case the input variable x is used to specify the drop-down menu that is being dealt with.

ONLINE RESOURCES

JavaScript Source
www.JavaScriptsource.com

Beginning JavaScript
www.pageresource.com/jscript

Bandwidth Conservation Society
www.infohiway.com/faster

Dynamic Drive
www.dynamicdrive.com

Dynamic HTML Zone
www.dhtmlzone.com

WebMonkey DHTML
www.webmonkey.com/authoring/dynamic_html

World Wide Web Consortium
www.w3.org

TOP TIPS!

! The techniques in this tutorial are compatible with Netscape and Internet Explorer browsers, and have been tested with Opera software as well. In the event that users of older browsers come across your page, it's likely that they'll just see all the site sections on a very long page.

! It's possible to trigger the display of your hidden layers using some method other than drop-down menus. Remove the menu handling section of JavaScript and replace it with whatever alternative you want to use - although the drop down method is space efficient.

```
    <div id="welcome" style="visibility: visible; position: absolute;
top: 50px; left: 10px">
    Welcome
    </div>

    <div id="second" style="visibility: hidden; position: absolute; top:
50px; left: 10px">
    Second layer
    </div>

    <div id="third" style="visibility: hidden; position: absolute; top:
50px; left: 10px">
    Third layer
    </div>

    </body></html>
```

4 Basic layer set up

Each section is held within a layer, defined by the DIV tag. The 'value' property of the OPTION tag must be the same as the 'id' property of the DIV tag that corresponds to that section's layer. The DIV tag's 'style' property sets the visibility and position details of the layer at the time of the page being loaded. Now all that's left is to put the section content into each DIV tag as desired.

5 The finished product in action

The site **www.jamesseabright.com** uses the script in this tutorial. It has four sections, all accessible from the drop-down menu. Large documents are not incorporated within the main HTML document. Instead they exist as independent files that are linked from the main site, often producing pop-up windows so that the user can easily continue from where they left off.

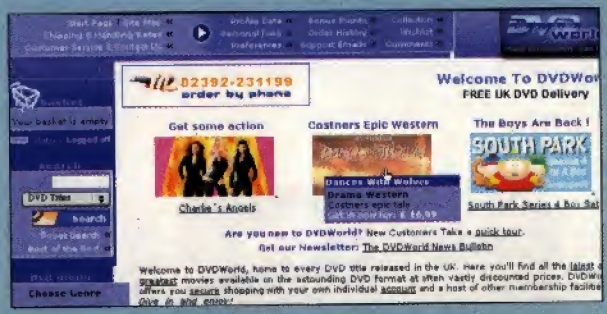
HIDDEN LAYERS IN ACTION

A WIDE RANGE OF SITES USE THE TECHNIQUES SHOWN IN THIS TUTORIAL TO ACHIEVE A WIDE RANGE OF DESIGN AIMS. HERE ARE THREE QUITE DIFFERENT EXAMPLES

The Times

www.thetimes.co.uk

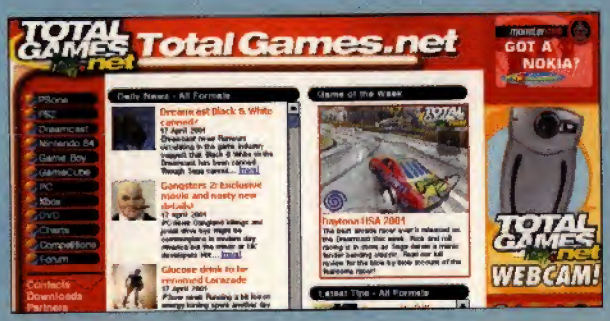
This newspaper site has so many sections that it's not really practical to list them all visibly on the page at the same time. Instead, it uses pop-up menus that appear when the user's mouse moves over one of the main navigation buttons that run along the top of the page. These are simply hidden layers that are triggered by a JavaScript action.



DVD World

www.dvdworld.co.uk

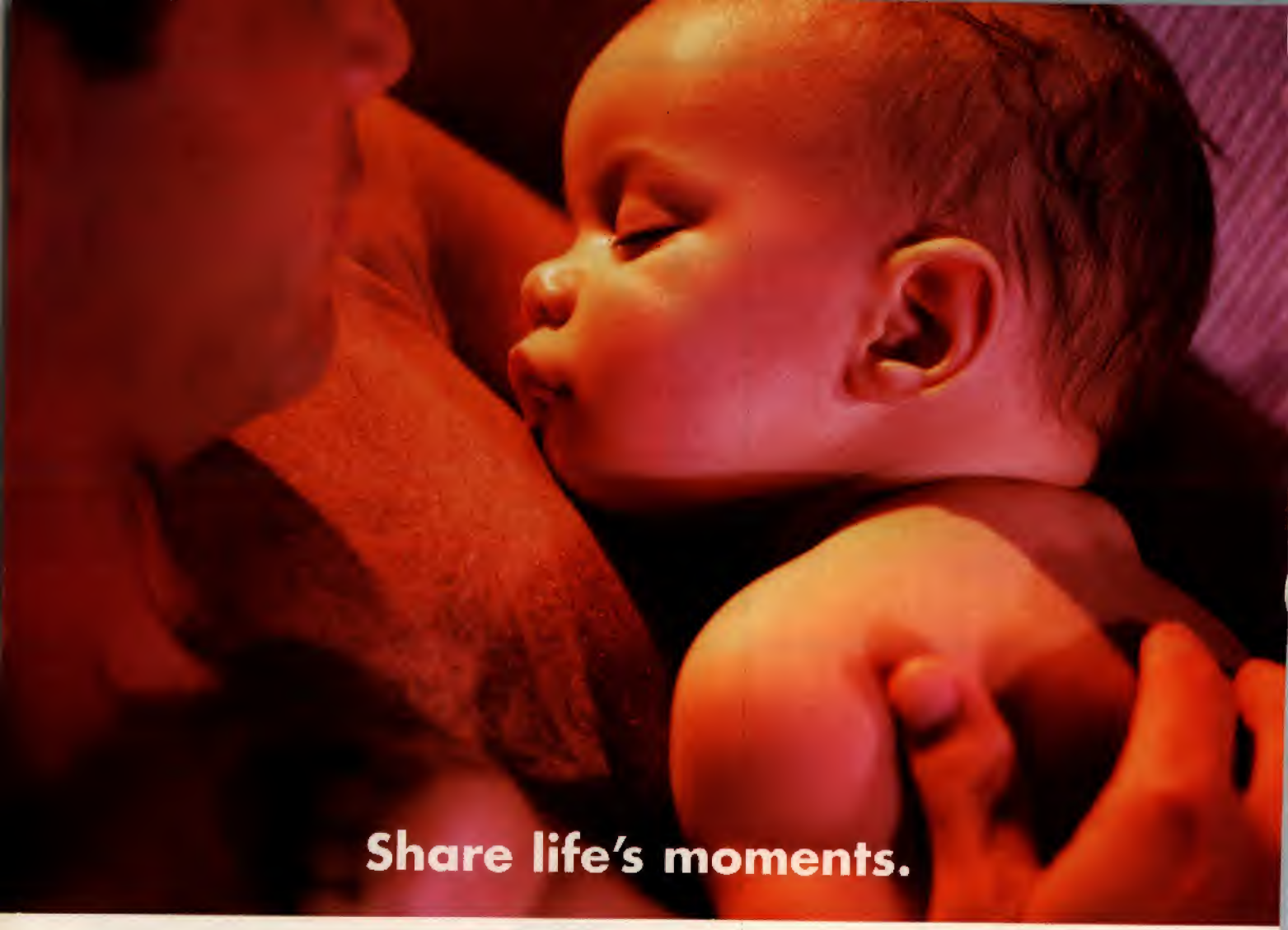
It's tricky to both present a large number of products and sufficient details in the limited space of a Web page. DVD World solves this by placing detailed product and price information in hidden layers that only appear when the user passes their mouse over the title or graphic for a particular DVD title. The layer also moves with the mouse pointer.



Total Games Network

www.totalgames.net

This video games site manages to squeeze lots of exciting content onto its pages by using a special form of the layer specification, which generates vertical scrollbars. This means that a number of different scrolling panels can be fitted into a small space, and users can scroll the panel of their choice to see further content as desired.



Share your moments of joy – quickly and easily with these great HP digital photography products: the HP PhotoSmart 215 digital camera, fun and easy-to-use; the HP ScanJet 5370c lets you scan, modify or e-mail your favourite pictures, negatives or photographic slides in superior quality, even scan directly to the Web – and the HP DeskJet 950c printer for ultimate photo-quality. For more details on these great products visit your nearest computer retailer.

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Your £ Business Online

The smart way to get your small business on the Net

POWER YOUR SMALL BUSINESS INTO PROFIT

32 PAGE JARGON-FREE GUIDE

While running a small business on the Net can be very rewarding, many people find it's also fraught with problems that can quickly turn into nightmares. That's why this issue is dedicated to solving those headaches and making life easier.

eBusiness Troubleshooting on page 86 explores the pitfalls that failed online stores have fallen into, while *Help!* (page 102) points you in the direction of free business advice.

Limiting your company to customers from one country is foolish – you need to maximise your profit potential. *Sell To The World* (pages 96-99) tells you how to go global.

Thanks for all your positive feedback about *Your Business Online*. I do read every message, so please keep sending me all of your comments...

Mark Newman, Editor
mnewman@paragon.co.uk

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eBriefing

SMALL BUSINESS INTERNET NEWS

Atmyside.com's founders want to help your business give better customer service

GIVE E-SHOPPERS BETTER SERVICE

Customer service a cause for concern

ONLINE SHOPPERS ARE still getting a raw deal when it comes to customer service, according to a new study which reveals that only five per cent of e-tailers monitor and meet their customer service level commitments.

The survey of 400 companies by Atmyside (**www.atmyside.com**) reveals that 90% of marketing directors admitted they don't know how long it takes their company to respond to a customer query.

"Queries can be, and should be, answered in minutes, not days," said Joe Murray, joint CEO of Atmyside (pictured with co-CEO Richard Tucker). "The technology that enables this to happen is already available and used to great effect in the US, but none of the 400 e-tailers surveyed even offered real-time Web-based interaction.

"The fact that 90% of companies surveyed think that waiting 48 hours for an answer is acceptable – and then don't even stick to these already generous terms – is not only insulting to the customer, but also commercially short-sighted. Even if a company's Web presence is only a small part of the business, customers are simply too valuable to risk losing – which is what will happen if organisations continue to ignore their online experiences," said Murray.

Atmyside provides a multi-lingual, real-time customer service solution via its live chat technology. It costs from £350/month per call centre person.

Online advertising bucks trend

DESPITE THE DOTCOM gloom, online advertising is growing at a staggering rate in the UK, growing over 200 per cent year-on-year.

Total spending on online advertising totalled £154.7 million in 2000, up from £51 million in 1999, according to the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB). The cost of online advertisements has now overtaken cinema advertising, estimated at 128 million pounds in 2000.

Paul Pilkington, Senior Manager at PriceWaterhouseCoopers, which carried out the survey along with the IAB, says, "In spite of a difficult year for the advertising sector, UK Internet advertising has continued to grow."

ECOMMERCE SOLUTION

FREE ISP ABEL Gratis (**www.abel.co.uk**) has launched an eCommerce package that lets you create a small store selling up to 20 products.

Users have access to FrontShop, a custom-developed eCommerce application allowing you to publish and sell securely online. This enables payment by credit/debit card, cheque and/or International Money Order, and the calculation of postage and packaging surcharges according to transaction value, weight or the addition of a single fixed sum, for both domestic and international delivery.

Following a simple set up process, a catalogue is created as a directory within your Web space. You are able to customise the appearance of your catalogue, and link to it from your home directory.

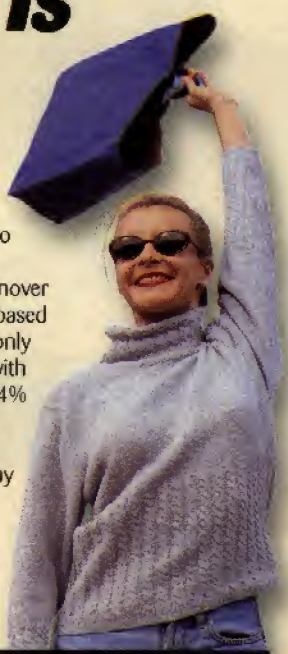
NEED A NEW WEB HOST?

LOOKING FOR A reliable, low-cost Web hosting solution for your eCommerce site? NTfinity has launched a range of hosting options to suit a range of purposes – from personal Web hosting to unlimited space for large business hosting.

Prices start from £70.50/year and include a free dot com domain name. The Small Business Web Hosting package (**www.ntfinity.com/web_hosting2.asp**) is aimed at small businesses that need a large Web presence. The high-end package, called Infinity Web Hosting, provides unlimited Web space and uses the latest Intel-based Microsoft Windows 2000 servers.

NTfinity also provides a Web site building service. The Start Up Design Package (**www.ntfinity.com/web_design1.asp**) is designed to help you get your business on the Web for the first time, while the Pro Design Package is ready for the business that needs a more professional Web presence.

Online shopping is booming again!



CONTRARY TO GLOOMY press coverage, eCommerce is booming and UK online spending is on the rise, according to new figures from WorldPay, the online payment service.

Figures for the first quarter show an increase in the take-up of WorldPay's service internationally, and in the online sales and transactions of companies. WorldPay (**www.worldpay.com**) has seen monthly revenues increasing across all its customer categories. In particular, businesses in the online speciality retail sector have increased revenue by 169%; online commercial computer hardware retailers 187%, and charities have noted a 215% upsurge in online donations. Only records, audio tapes and CDs have fallen.

At 34%, the increase in turnover generated by WorldPay's UK-based clients for the first quarter is only fractionally behind the USA, with growth in Europe at around 24% and Asia around 19%.

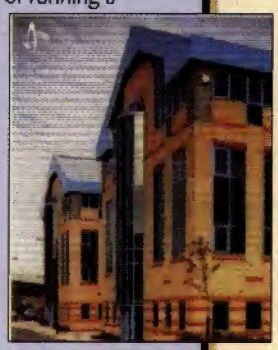
Phil Battison, European Managing Director of WorldPay said: "UK WorldPay clients have seen an increase in turnover of 34% from January to March this year. It's a fantastic start to the year."

SMALL BUSINESS NEWS IN BRIEF

☐ One of the UK's fastest growing ISPs is launching a new small business portal for small British firms in conjunction with Smallbiz UK. Firstnet Services is providing a Web-based service that covers an array of business subjects, including staffing, IT and business Supplies. The portal at http://firstnet.smallbiz.uk.com also provides a variety of free business software, services and support.

☐ **Need some help in maximising the effectiveness of management and business procedures at your company? Guildsoft (www.guildsoft.co.uk) has launched a new version of Qudos Meeting Manager which lets users maximise the benefits of meetings by planning, running and recording them more efficiently and more effectively. It costs £29.95 including VAT.**

☐ An eCommerce operator based in the North East has slashed the cost of running a dedicated Web server. Newcastle-based The Web Works has launched its own 'server-farm' called The North East Data Centre (**www.ne-datacentre.co.uk**), which runs a dedicated server from just £1,300 allowing companies of all sizes to operate their sites faster and to run the latest software.



TALKING SHOP

STATS FOR YOUR SITE

FIND OUT WHO'S VISITING YOUR ECOMMERCE SITE AND WHERE THEY'VE COME FROM

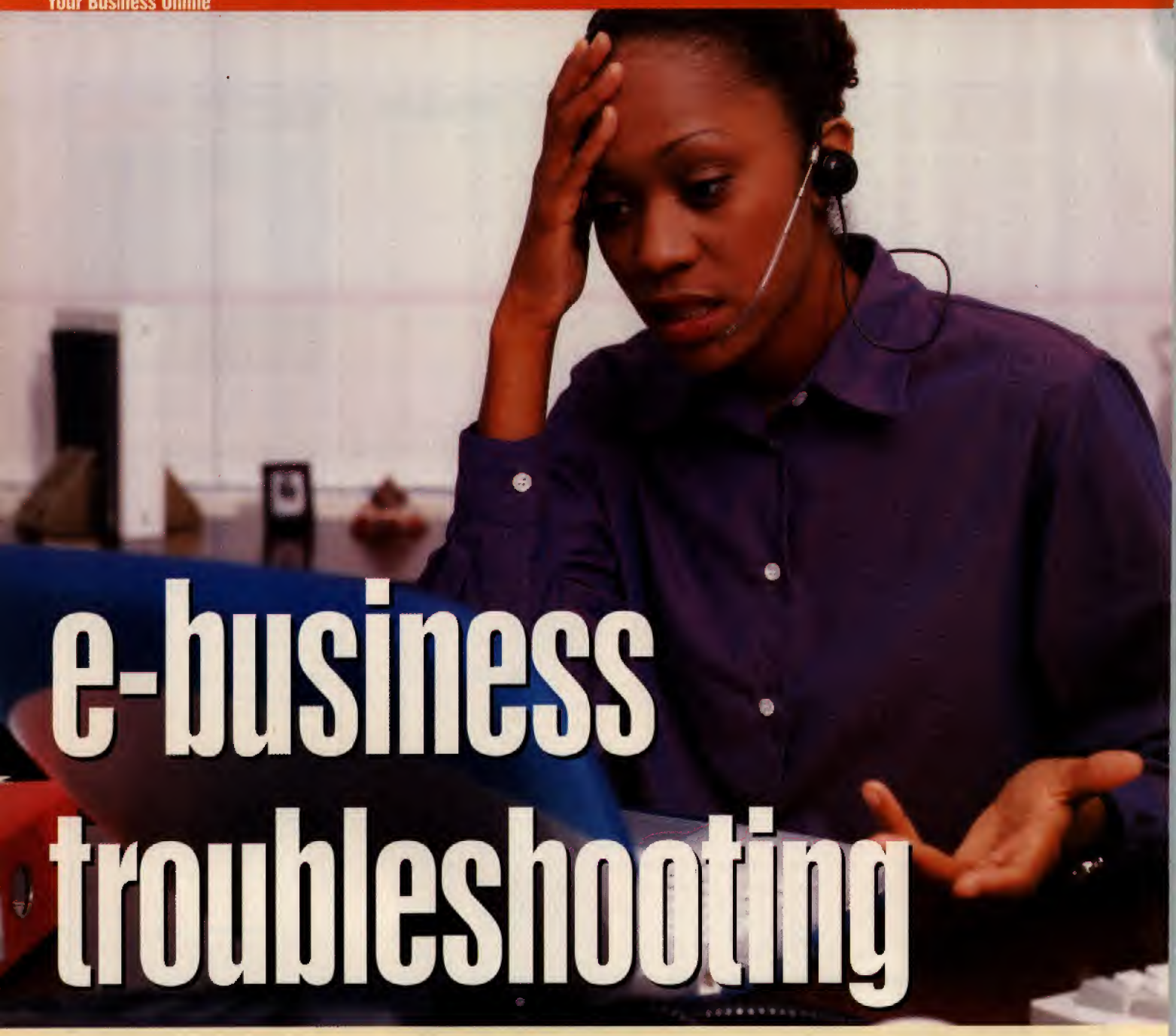
So, you've got hosting, you've built your Web site and you've unleashed it on the general public – but how is your Web site performing and where are your visitors coming from? To find this out you need to use a statistics program. Statistics programs can provide you with valuable information about your Web site. They may also help you determine what type of traffic (visitors) your site is receiving and show where you could make improvements to the overall design of your site.

Profile by numbers

Statistic programs can produce detailed reports containing extensive analysis concerning your Web site and the visitors that access your site. Some of the primary features include, but are not limited to, Visitor Information – where they came from (eg through a search engine or a partners Web site), how long they stayed on your site and which pages they accessed, summaries of Access Times and Dates (which can help to measure marketing activities performance) and Individual Page Statistics.

Most importantly, stats packages measure Error pages and where you are losing visitors. With this information you can quickly modify important pages - add to pages people are visiting most, eliminate error pages and change locations (for example removing images that take ages to download) where customers tend to disappear off your site. There are a number of packages available to you, from basic packages that you can down load for free, to advanced trend analysis programs which take Web site and customer analysis to a far higher level. Speak to your Web host, they should offer you free Web stats with your hosting, or at least give you an idea of the best packages to chose for your needs.

*Andrew Thompson is Marketing Manager at Verio, one of the world's largest Web hosting companies and a leading provider of comprehensive Internet services. See **www.verio.co.uk** for more information*



e-business troubleshooting

Jo Chipchase reports on how e-businesses can turn potentially damaging situations into successes

It's not a pretty picture within the e-industry. According to a recent study by analyst group Webmergers.com, dot com deaths are up 3,000% on year 2000 levels. A record-breaking 147 Internet companies went bust during early 2001. Since January 2000, at least 369 dot coms have croaked, with 40% ceasing to trade during the last quarter.

Although the bulk of failures are eCommerce ventures relying on retail revenues, creative agencies and infrastructure providers have also been affected, with industry layoffs becoming endemic. Even tech sector giants are feeling the pinch, with Cisco Systems, Intel and Yahoo! reporting reduced profits and Motorola and Nortel Networks reporting losses.

So, with the market bottoming out (remember that a shake-out was inevitable from the start), it's more important than ever to get things right with your e-biz if you want it to survive. Having a realistic plan that's scaled correctly is a good starting point – in other words, not spending millions of pounds to promote a venture that will sell a few moderately priced items a week. It also pays to learn by the experiences of others and steer clear of common pitfalls that could turn your fledgling venture into a dead duck, rather than a cash cow.

We spoke to four eCommerce directors who have coped with sticky situations, turned them round to their benefit, and have subsequently seen business flourish.

The experiences of our four directors prove that careful research, good project management, well-targeted marketing and being prepared for the unexpected – whether it's fraud, high demand, or a new customer base emerging – go a long way to ensuring the success of your eCommerce venture. Listening to customer feedback and being able to scale your operations flexibly are also vital. After all, with the current state of play, you don't want to be putting off potential business.

TELEGRAM TEDDY

Coping with unexpected demand

During October 2000, Telegram Teddy (**www.telegramteddy.com**) launched to the UK market. Run by a four-strong management team, the new venture offered customers the ability to send personalised teddy bears to friends and loved ones.

From the outset, customer service was considered important. Says Ed Shah of the Telegram Teddy Company: "We aimed for 100% customer satisfaction, from placing the order through to receipt of the goods. Consumers are sceptical about purchasing on the Internet, and we felt we must overcompensate on customer service to win their loyalty."

However, unexpected events would soon catapult the Telegram Teddy Company into customer service chaos. Shortly before Christmas, 'bad boy' of pop, Robbie Williams, sent a bear to Liam Gallagher with its head ripped off, and the story appeared in *The Sun*. Subsequent features filtered into other national newspapers and on to TV. Demand for Telegram Teddies started to mushroom beyond all expectations.

Then, on Christmas Eve, a national newspaper recommended Telegram Teddy, stating that the deadline for orders within the M25 zone was that day. Oops! With orders flooding in at the very last minute, the company had a festive fulfillment problem on its hands... and zero chance of relaxing over a few glasses of mulled wine.

"We were inundated with requests and, in an attempt not to disappoint customers, we endeavoured to fulfill the orders," says Shah. "We put together a crack team of local cab companies, friends and family, and our office became a 'control centre'. The last order was delivered at 1.30pm on Christmas Day."

Happy relations

Fortunately, the customer relations exercise went well. Shah explains: "Several friends, including one of the directors, were dressed in Santa Claus outfits during the packing stages and delivery to customers. Most customers assumed this was 'business as usual'."

Would the story have been different if Telegram Teddy had said: 'sorry – we can't cope'? Shah says: "Customers expectations are high in this market and lack of fulfillment would have been extremely detrimental to the business."

Telegram Teddy now outsources its customer service functions to a professional fulfillment house, which has the capacity to dispatch 1 – 6,000 orders per week. If necessary, trained temporary workers can be brought in at very short notice to handle unexpected demand. So, what has the management team learnt from its experience? Shah comments: "It's very difficult to develop a forecast model that's 100% accurate, especially for a new company in a new market. Always be prepared for the unexpected!"

Robbie Williams caused excitement about this service, after ripping off a bear's head and sending it to Liam

Ed Shah of the Telegram Teddy Company: "Always be prepared for the unexpected"

LONDONLAUNCH

Get the correct target market

LondonLaunch (**www.londonlaunch.com**) went live during December 2000. The brainchild of PR and event manager, Will Broome, the site was designed to help professionals organise bashes. While providing a free consultancy service to visitors, the venture would earn revenue by charging organisations that wanted a full-blown event management service, and by gaining commission on all bookings channelled through it.

Although LondonLaunch was originally aimed at a business audience, the venture soon discovered it unintentionally appealed to consumers. Said Broome: "We quickly realised people were using our service for peripheral things – such as organising weddings, barmitzvahs and private birthday parties. The site wasn't originally designed for these purposes."

The situation wasn't helped by press coverage, which cited LondonLaunch as a good place to "find a portable ice rink for little Johnny's 5th birthday". Something had to be done, as the site was showing a visitor breakdown of 70% businesses and 30% consumers.

To capitalise on its newly discovered target market, LondonLaunch was repurposed through adjustments to its content and back-end. Says Broome: "The site was re-vamped to appear more consumer-friendly. Various questions were incorporated into our virtual consultancy process, such as 'do you require the venue to have a wedding license', etc. "

Will Broome of LondonLaunch: "Know your industry, as it's hard to break into an area you know little about"

Prevention better than cure

Could the extra work have been avoided at site conception stage? "Yes," says Broome. "We could have focused on niche areas for consumers, besides providing a comprehensive service for corporate event planning." From a marketing perspective, LondonLaunch has learnt to target specific media sectors.

What advice would Broome offer industry entrants? "Focus on old economy business methods, and don't get wrapped up thinking that new media means new economy. The only businesses that will survive are those with strong foundations. Know your industry, as it's hard to break into an area you know little about."

LondonLaunch was inundated by a new audience it hadn't considered at the start...

ONLINE RESOURCES: WHERE TO GET E-BIZ HELP

www.virginbiz.net
Take advice on setting up and running an e-business. Virgin's site has a community aspect, including an online forum.

www.newmediazero.com
Keep abreast of industry trends and analysis.

http://revolution.haynet.com/wall
New media people discuss topics of interest on 'The Wall', and it's worth monitoring their opinions.

www.netquest1.com/ecommerce3.htm
A step-by-step guide to planning an online shop. The report is a couple of years old and American, too, but the strategic advice still stands (you'll need to ignore the section about eCommerce software).

www.Shopsmart.co.uk
Suss out the competition to your venture.

Toys for the boys sold much better when they weren't on a "bedroom" site

FIREBOX

The need for project management

Firebox (**www.firebox.com**) launched during May 1998. The venture was set up by Michael Smith and Tom Boardman as a conduit for selling 'boys toys' to the likes of *FHM* and *Maxim* readers.

Although Firebox has managed to establish itself as a leader in gizmo retail, it hasn't been an easy ride for the Web site. Michael reflects: "We had numerous problems in the early days trying to convince suppliers to send products, when we were just two guys with no money operating out of our bedrooms. We had to be very persistent to get people to take us seriously."

The amateurish appearance of the site was also detracting from customer confidence, so the boys planned a redesign and relaunch during mid 2000. However, the development work didn't stick to schedule. Michael explains: "We underestimated what was involved in the relaunch, and assumed things would be on time. However, once a job gets off track, it easily spirals out of control."

Almost there

Eventually, 95% of the work was finished on the relaunch date, after the core team had worked through two days and nights without sleep to avoid the embarrassment of a postponement. "We got the important content up and brought a few extra features on board during the next couple of days," says Michael. "It was a very stressful time!"

Michael Smith of Firebox: "Having several people in charge of a project can only lead to chaos"

Fortunately, the reaction from press, investors, suppliers and consumers was good. Michael says: "We saw conversion rates on the site more than double practically overnight, accompanied by a big jump in average basket size. This was because consumers felt happier giving their details to the professionally designed site."

So, what did the Firebox team learn in the way of project management skills? "With the benefit of hindsight, we'd set down exactly what we were going to achieve by when, appoint one person as the project leader, and make sure team members reported to this person anything that was getting behind schedule."

Although 'feature creep' and 'unexpectedly bloating project' can lead to 'frighteningly large development bill', Michael believes a decent online store doesn't need to cost the earth. He also recommends that industry entrants should do their homework, reading as many relevant magazines and books as possible.

HOW NOT TO LAUNCH AN E-STORE

Unless you're foolish, or very rich and have money to burn, the idea of investing in an e-store is to achieve a reasonable return. Old-fangled business plans that explore viable revenue streams and sensibly predict profit and loss are a good idea. Appointing a flashy CEO who has a taste for Bollinger, Ferraris and cocaine is not a recommended tactic.

Conversely, you can go too far with the idea of scrimping and saving. Spend enough on your site for it to look professional and have the desired functionality, otherwise potential customers won't have confidence in you. Make sure you invest in search engine placement and offline marketing, otherwise customers won't be able to find your site, and it will be one big waste of money in the first place.

If your venture is large, you may need to appoint a PR agency for the launch. Contrary to popular belief, not all PR people are 'Ab Fab', and the good ones have their feet planted firmly on the ground, meaning they won't say "yes" to your every whim, while sipping on a large gin and tonic. You might get a better deal from a smaller agency that takes a fresh approach.

Sometimes, the desire to realise your hard work and investment can result in the urge to unleash a site on to the public before it has been properly tested. Do not do this, at any cost, unless you want angry customers bombarding you with complaints and journalists castigating you to a wide audience (remember: this was Boo's downfall). Unless you enjoy public humiliation, test your site with a fine toothcomb on all platforms and browsers.

BUYONNET

Overcoming online fraud

The Buyonet Group (**www.buyonet.com**) was launched in Sweden during 1997 by Freddy Tengberg and Wanda Manninger, as a retailer of software for business, educational and home use by a new method – "electronic software delivery".

Despite a promising start, Buyonet soon experienced a large-scale problem with fraud. The company was breaking into a completely new area of retail, and electronic software delivery gave fraudsters a window of opportunity. Although Buyonet had searched carefully for partners who could handle credit card payments worldwide, and believed they would give protection against fraud, this proved not to be the case.

Freddy Tenberg of Buyonet explains: "After just three months of trading, 25% of our transactions, representing 30% of our revenue, were fraudulent. As the retailer, we were liable for these costs." The bank used for Buyonet's credit card transactions got nervous, said that the business would never work, and threatened to pull out.

Faced with closure, Buyonet had to act rapidly. Tenberg explains: "This was an extremely difficult problem to tackle. Credit cards are stolen; the fraudsters only need the credit card number. No physical address can be used to track the criminal."

Buyonet's Freddy Tenberg: "Online retailers don't always realise they'll be liable for loss"

He adds: "We looked at the behaviour of customers as they bought products on the Web site, and compared criminals' behaviour to honest customers' movements. We found that the two groups acted in very different ways. This information was used to find potential frauds at an early stage. "

Crime busters

Using the results of its research, Buyonet was able to create a fraud prevention system, which has brought its fraud rate to below 3%. Although the early situation wasn't ideal, the company has started selling its anti-fraud system to other people.

So, what advice would Tenberg give about data security? He comments: "It's the smaller operations who generally have the least sophisticated anti-fraud systems. This is understandable, as they are expensive. But often, online retailers don't realise they'll be held liable for losses if they fail to obtain a cardholder signature or verify the shipping address before delivery.

"It's a huge mistake – once criminals discover your site has a lax payment system, you become a well-known target, and may lose more money than a decent anti-fraud system would have cost."

The plug was almost pulled on Buyonet when fraud affected 25% of its transactions

What is the difference between a Needle in a Haystack and a WebOrator Member?

To Your Company webOrator.com, is the ultimate Worldwide marketing tool.

In webOrator.com your company Profile is professionally presented to the world 24 hours a day in the form of a comprehensive, easy to navigate InfoWeb. It shows your future customers exactly what they need to know about you.

As a Member company, webOrator.com enables you to be directly identified by your profile, your products and your services.

Your Products and Services can be found easily as they are identified to your company under the industry Trade Centre within your World Market. No "junk surfing" just specific selection with finite results - it couldn't be easier.

To Your Potential Clients webOrator.com is the definitive source of companies, their people, their products and services.

At last, one simple to use interface enables business to find the services or products they require as well as news, careers information and business opportunities for an infinite number of industries.

webOrator plc

ATTRACTING WORLD MARKETS

www.weborator.com

WebOrator plc - The Colseum 74-76 Peascod Street, Windsor, Berkshire SL4 1DH. T:+44(0)1753 833050 - Free Phone: 0800 316 8454 - F:+44(0)1753 833060 - E:sales@weborator.com

"Finding anything on-line can be like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack!"

The Internet is an efficient and time saving disseminator of up to the minute news and information. The technology is cheap, works well and operates globally. As a marketing tool the Web is a great equaliser enabling small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) to trade with the bigger players on the Internet. The problem is having a Web presence is not enough and is often only secondary marketing, a point that many fail to realise until they have paid for a web site that sits there for months producing few or zero results.

Many organisations will advertise their name and address, what they do and then say visit us at www..... If the primary invitation to visit the Web site didn't inspire, the Web site won't be visited... hence it's secondary marketing nature.

Finding anything on-line can be like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack!

Search engines can provide some of the answer to being found by those who don't know you however generally search engines lack true trade specific focus. Try searching for the manufacturer of an Industrial Pump using a standard search engine; you are just as likely to get manufacturers of American trainers.

For the big players with significant advertising budgets being known and hence found may be less of a problem but if the Web site does not readily convey rapid informative evaluation forget it as a marketing tool.

WebOrator plc makes sense of the Web and provides a presence designed to address these issues.

www.weborator.com

WebOrator delivers an affordable, solid business-to-business marketing platform through the Internet that links companies products and services to potential customers. The service is provided on a membership basis directed to the company looking to attract new markets, is free to the user and will ultimately be applied to almost every business sector globally!

WebOrator provides the ultimate worldwide marketing tool - Enables any business to be identified by their profile, products and services - Provides to the users the definitive source of business information.

In short WebOrator provides through a friendly graphic interface, a series of uniform trade specific shop windows displaying global companies, their products and services. Where companies already have a comprehensive web site WebOrator provides the vital link from the overview shop window thus enabling the company's web site to be found without prior knowledge of the company.

WebOrator in addition provides free to Members a number of trade specific related services including recruitment, business opportunities and news as well as free Internet access to members and visitors. For more information visit www.weborator.com or telephone 01753 833050 or Free phone 0800 316 8454. **WO**

Turn your site into an earner!

How to: Use the fully-working version of EROL on this month's CD-ROM to give your site eCommerce capabilities

You can find a fully working version of EROL on this month's Practical Internet CD

IF YOU HAVE a small business already, or are thinking of setting up one (if only to escape the boss's clutches), you really ought to consider featuring online sales as part of your business plan. The Web can help you to discover a far wider, and importantly, more cost effective market-base than traditional sales techniques alone.

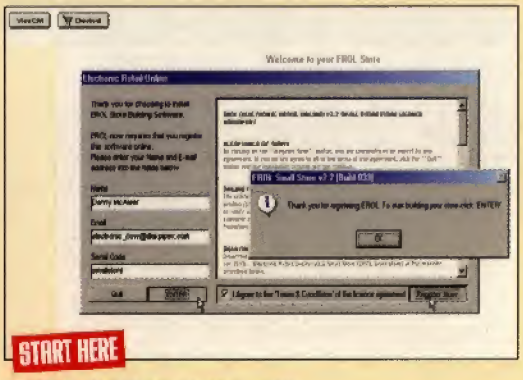
Whilst there are many programs available for building shops, often packaged with secure trading deals with Web hosts, EROL is a fantastic option (especially since it's free on the CD-ROM). Unlike a number of other eCommerce software packages, EROL takes a more flexible approach to building your online shop. Rather than choosing from a collection of pre-designed templates, which aren't at all complementary to your corporate identity, EROL enables you to add your own HTML tags, to manipulate templates, and make sweeping changes to the look of the site with just a couple of options. With the software, it's possible to build a unique shop, instead of shoe-horning it into someone else's idea of a well-designed Web site...

TOP TIPS

The order in which your sections appear in the Menu frame is determined by the order in which you enter them. If you want to place an item earlier or later in the list, highlight it and press the 'Cut Item' button from the row of buttons at the top of the Administrator window. Next, select the item that you want this entry to appear after (if you want it to be the first, then highlight the 'Layout Table' element, and press 'Paste'.

EROL enables you to add HTML tags to almost every object, so it's possible to add things such as horizontal rules, align objects, and even add Flash elements. However, do not use double-quotes to encapsulate values (unless it's a file path.

If you write your own HTML, you have more control over its alignment and interaction with the other elements on the page than you do if you use the 'Browse' option to add a picture. However, EROL likes to save all the site's pictures in its own 'images' folder, so do make sure you copy the picture there and link to it correctly. If you're in any doubt, use the 'Browse' tool instead...

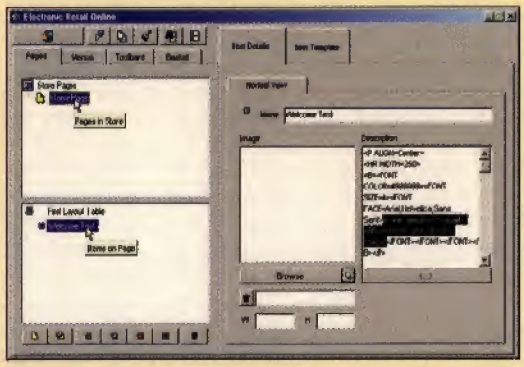


1 Register your copy

Before you can start using EROL you need to register your copy online. Enter your name and email address into the spaces provided (leave the serial code the same), read the licence agreement and tick the box. Then, press the 'Register' button. Now you can press 'Enter' to start building.

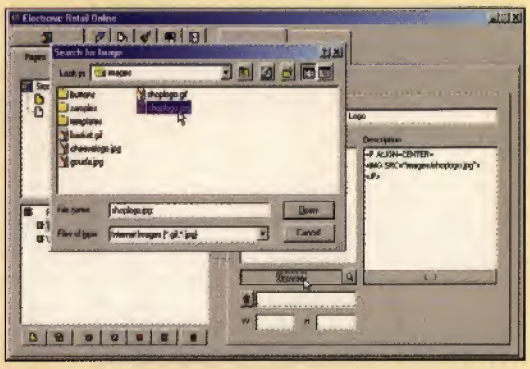
2 Setting up your shop

Press the 'Build Your Store' button in the top bar to open the 'Administrator' window. Divided into four sections, each represents a frame on the finished page. Press the 'Pages' tab and enter a name for your shop, and set the default font size.



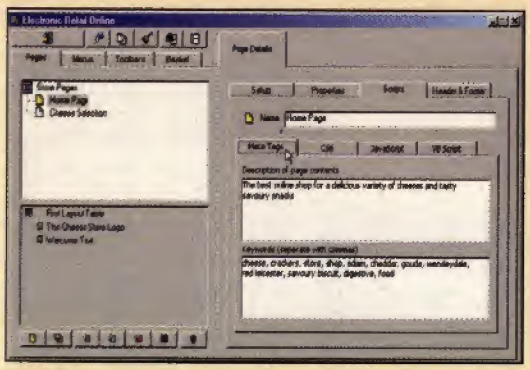
3 Welcome to the store

In the tree view on the left, click on the 'Home Page' icon. A panel will appear at the bottom that contains a list of all the objects on the page. To edit the 'Welcome Text' message, click on it and change the introduction in the right-hand panel that appears.



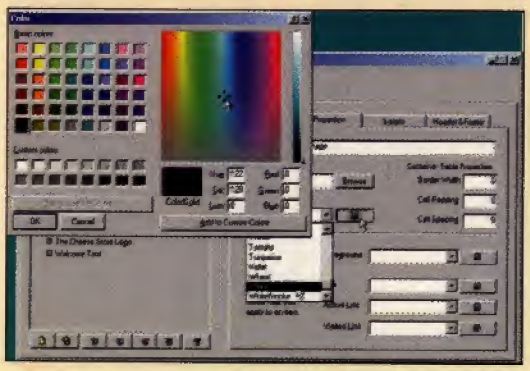
4 Adding a logo

To insert a picture, press the 'Add Display Item' underneath the 'Item' panel on the left-hand side of the window. The right-hand screen will change to this new Item's properties. Enter a new name and either press 'Browse' or add the above HTML to insert an Image.



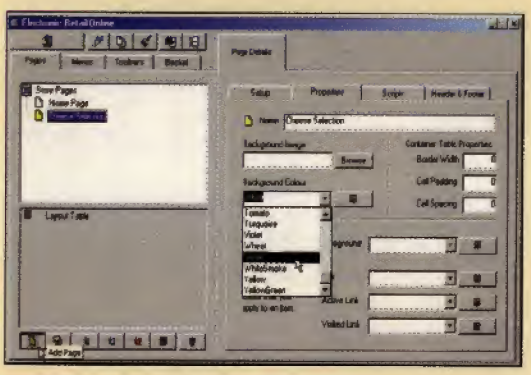
5 A site description

Click back on the 'Home Page' icon in the 'Store Pages' tree list, then on the 'Scripts' tab on the right. Underneath this are four other tabs. Press 'Meta Tags' and use the spaces provided to enter first a thorough description of your shop, and then a list of keywords to summarise its content.



6 Backgrounds and colours

If you want a different background image or colour, click on the 'Properties' tab. Press 'Browse' to load an image, else use either the pull-down menu to pick a colour, or press the 'Palette' button. This opens a standard Windows palette, enabling you to accurately choose the colour you want.

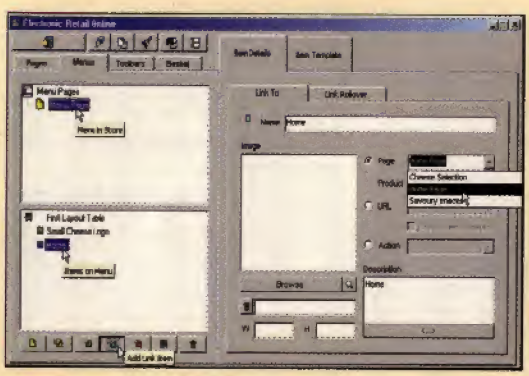


7 Adding pages

To insert your first product page, click on the 'Pages' tab and then highlight the 'Home Page' icon (this accesses the tools on the bottom row). In here press the 'Add Page' button. As with the home page, use the controls on the right to edit the page name and background colour.

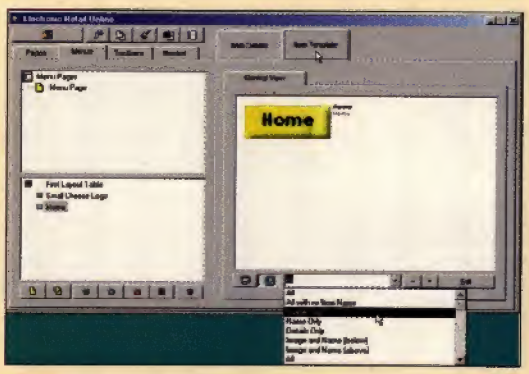
8 Navigation menu

Add all the other pages you need to the list (we'll edit them later), and then click on the 'Menus' tab at the top of the window. Now all the pages are added, it's possible to set up the navigation menu. Using the controls on the right-hand side, choose the menu width and page position.



9 Adding links to pages

Click on the 'Menu Page' entry in the tree list to start adding your links. Press the blue 'Add Link Item' button and then enter a label for it in the 'Name' text box on the right. Ensuring the 'Page' radio button is selected, click on the drop-down menu and choose the page to link.



10 Using buttons

You may want to use a button graphic as opposed to a dull, text link. If this is so, press 'Browse' to open a picture to use. After this, click on the 'Item Template' to preview the object. Use the pull-down menu below to choose which template you want to use. 'Name' is good for text-only links.

TOP TIPS

! If you want to write a little introduction for each section (it will appear next to the navigation link in the menu), enter it into the 'Description' field when setting up your hyperlink. Then, choose the option 'All with no Item Name' in the 'Item Template'.

! None of the default templates enable you to place the description underneath an image (only the name of the object), but if this is what you want to do, there is a way around it. Select the template (as per the previous tip), and then press 'Edit' to customise it. Although you cannot directly edit the image placeholder's alignment properties, adding <BR CLEAR=ALL> (new line after the end of the previous object) tag before the text, will ensure it sits below the image.

JARGON BUSTER

? Meta Tag
These HTML tags are a way of describing the content of your Web pages to search engines, so that your site may be more easily found by other people. The most important Meta tags are 'keywords' and 'description'. The former tells search engines which words can be linked to the content of your site. You can have up to 1,024 characters in your keywords Meta tag, although you shouldn't repeat words because these are often discounted. The description is often used by search engines underneath the entry for your Web site.

? Frame
A way of physically dividing the browser window into sections so several separate HTML documents can be viewed and updated.

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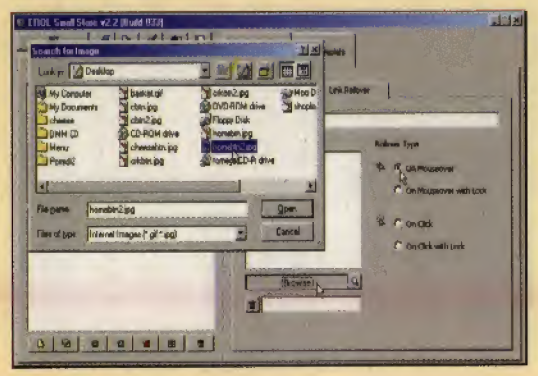
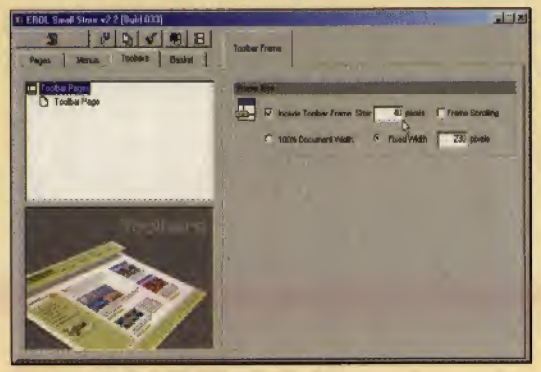
Payment Gateway
A company that handles online credit card transactions on your behalf. It processes the payment side of the order for you, then sends you details so you can despatch the goods to your customer. The money is automatically credited to your business account, less a small service charge.

Merchant ID
A merchant refers to a company that has the facility to accept card payments. Each merchant is provided with a unique merchant ID number by the bank at which your account is held. There are three types of merchant ID numbers: for shops, mail order and eCommerce.



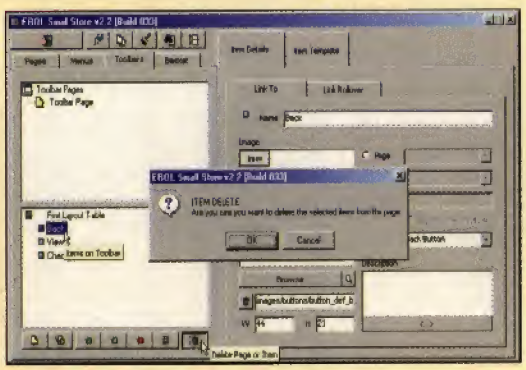
11 Roll-over buttons

When using graphics for links, you can optionally add roll-over properties. To do this, click on the 'Link Rollover' tab, and choose your new picture by pressing 'Browse'. Choose whether you want this animation to occur on 'mouse-over' or 'click' events using the radio button options.



12 More links and gadgets

Add and edit links for the remainder of the pages on your site, and then press the 'Toolbars' tab. This is an optional frame on the site that provides 'View Basket' and 'Checkout' buttons. Set the size required (no less than 40 pixels), and then click on the 'Toolbar Page' icon to edit its properties.

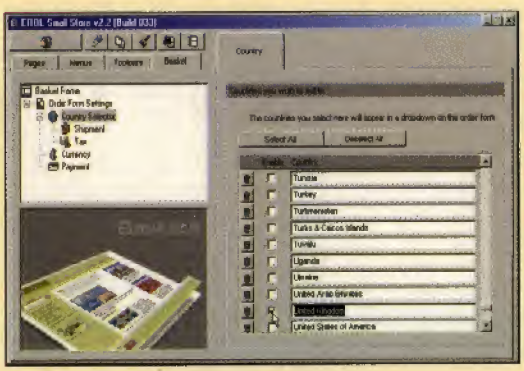


13 Configuring the toolbar

The Toolbar is pre-configured with 'Back', 'View' and 'Checkout' buttons. Whilst the latter two are necessary, you might not want the former. To delete it, highlight it and press the 'Dustbin' button at the bottom of the window. Then click on the 'Properties' tab to set up the background colour.

14 Basket case

The final part of setting up your shop is to configure your shopping basket. Click on the 'Basket' tab. If you want thumbnails to appear to indicate your shopper's purchases, ensure that the 'Basket Frame' box is checked. Set the size to around 50 pixels, and any background colours or image you want.

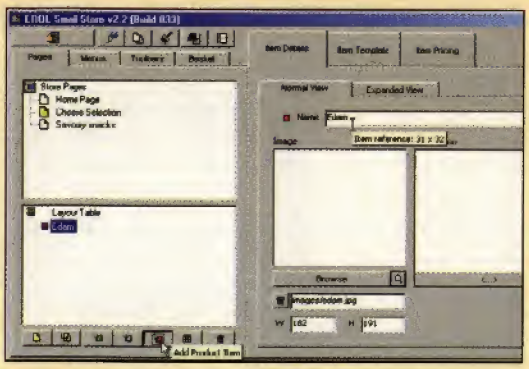


15 Order form configuration

Click on the 'Country Selector' icon if you want to limit the countries to which you intend to sell. In here, you'll find a list of more than 240 countries. Uncheck the boxes of any you wish to exclude. Tax Shipping, and Currency are already set-up for UK sales, so you can leave these fields.

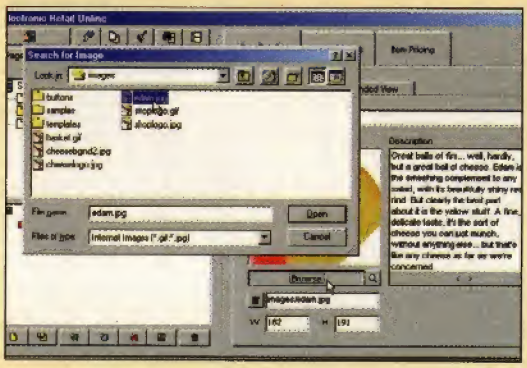
16 Money matters

Press the 'Payment' tab and enter you store's email address in the space provided. Next, tick whether you want to accept on or off-line payments. For online payments, you will need to provide your Merchant ID number, and select your Payment Gateway from the list of available companies.



17 Entering your wares

It's now finally time to add your products. Open the 'Pages' section once again, and click on your first product page. You'll find the 'Add Product Item' button amongst the bottom row of buttons. Click on this to add a new entry, then enter its name into the space provided on the right.

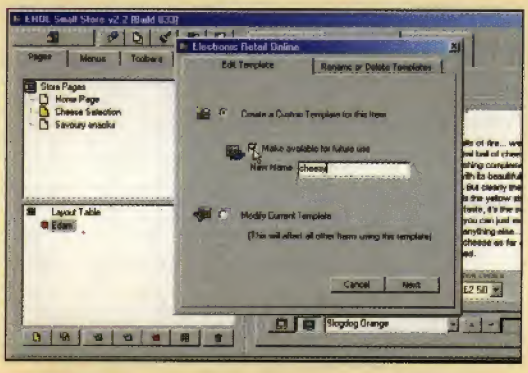


18 Sell it to your customers

Enter a description of your product (if you want to add text formatting, or any other elements, you can use HTML tags), then press the 'Browse' button to load your picture. The size parameters will be automatically filled in, though if do you want to reduce the image slightly, you can do so.

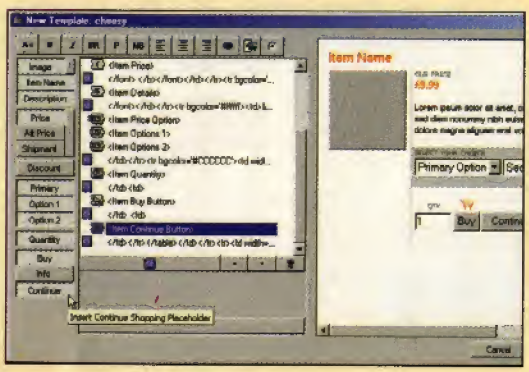
19 Pick a product template

Press the 'Item Template' button to determine how the product will be displayed on the Web page. At the bottom of the preview you'll find a pull-down menu. Select a template that most closely matches your design and 'widget' requirements (prices, buy buttons and so on) from here.



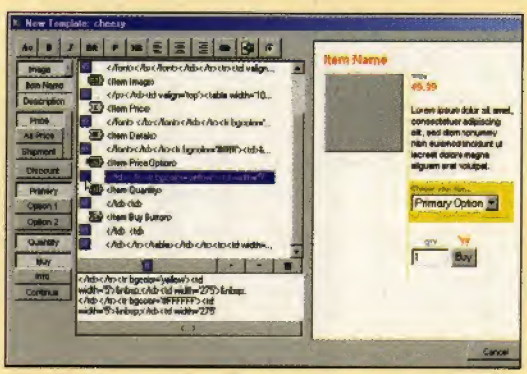
20 Building new product templates

If you want to further customise this template, press the 'Edit' button. In the dialog, ensure that 'Create a custom template' option is selected, and then check the box 'Make available for future use' so it can be used for your other products, enter a name and press 'Next'.



21 Choosing your widgets

In the 'Template Editor' window you'll see a list of widgets available to you. Those already in use are selected. To remove unwanted items, push the button to deselect it. To add a widget, you first need to select where, in the list of HTML and items, you want it to appear before pressing the button.



22 The nuts and bolts

Further customisation can be achieved using the 'HTML line editor' including editing existing tags (to change colours, alignments or styles), or adding new ones (such as adding pictures and other elements). Select the relevant blue tag icon from the list to begin editing it in the panel below.

TOP TIPS

- Rather than launching straight into a list of the products available for sale, add a display graphic at the top to introduce each section. By making use of the 'Description' property you can also write an introductory passage of text to sit alongside the department logo.
- Because the Template editor is so flexible, you can cdelete every last element and start your product template from scratch. Although you do need to be quite competent at HTML to do this, it does mean that you can really make your online shop unique.
- Remember that, when you're entering your product's price into the Administrator, the software will automatically add VAT at 17.5%. If you don't want it to do this, click on the 'Tax' tab and set it to 'n/a'. Alternatively, you will need to calculate the VAT-free price and enter this instead.

TOP TIPS

- When gathering together your product images, try to ensure that they're all of a uniform size (at least in terms of one of its dimensions, which is width for vertically listed items). This way your shop will look much smarter.
- Create a smaller version of your shop logo and insert it into the top of your menu frame to give your shop a professional edge. It also ensures that your company logo is always visible.

GETTING YOUR MONEY'S WORTH

There are a number of companies who operate as Payment Gateways for eCommerce, all with varying plans and prices. The best thing to do when you're ready to start trading is to calculate an estimated income from the site, and gauge this against the level of service you require and how much you can afford to spend. Take a look at some of these sites for more information:

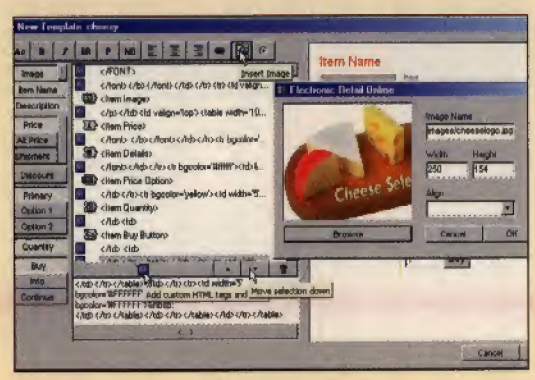
Verio
www.verio.co.uk
WorldPay
www.worldpay.com
Virgin Biz
www.virginbiz.net
Secure Trading
www.securetrading.co.uk

JARGON BUSTER

Alignment
The term used to describe how an object appears on a page (or in a table cell or frame) relative to the edges. Generally, you have a choice of three different types of alignment: left, centre or right justified.

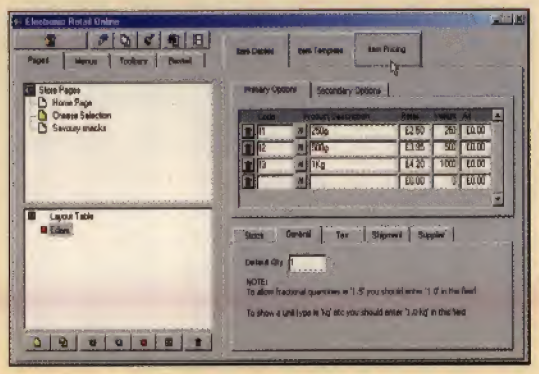
Host Address
This is the name of your ISP or Web space provider's FTP (File Transfer Protocol) site. EROL needs to know this so that it can upload your shop files to the right Web space.

Absolute and Relative URLs
There are two types of URL, relative and absolute. The latter includes the entire location, such as 'http://www.paragon.co.uk'. Relative URLs refer to files or pages that are part of the same Web site, so do not need the entire location. For example, a picture on a page might be in a separate directory, and so its URL relative to the page would be: 'images/picture.jpg'



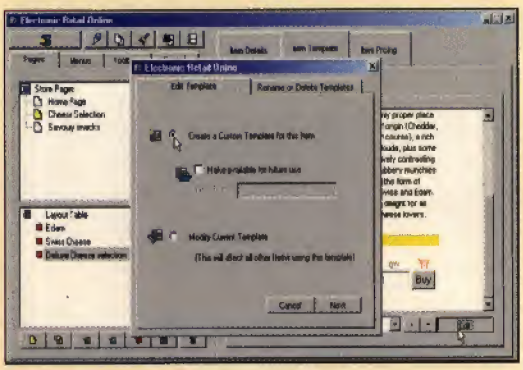
23 Further editing in HTML

Additional HTML can be added, either using the toolbar at the top (for adding pictures, further form elements and hyperlinks), or by pressing the blue tag icon just above the HTML line editor panel. To move an HTML element up or down the list, use the arrow buttons.



24 Setting your price

Press 'Done' when you've finished editing, and then click on the 'Item Pricing' tab back in the Administrator window. If your item has only one price, enter this into the first row and ignore the others. Different prices for other sizes, for example, should be entered into the subsequent rows.

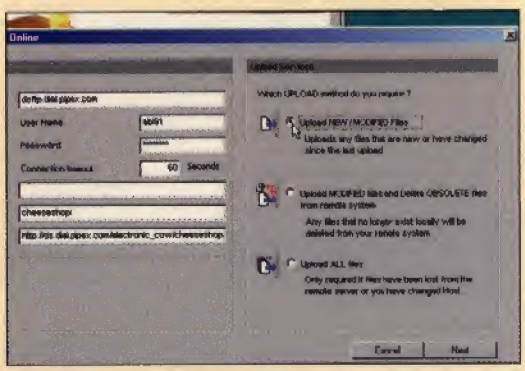


25 Reusing and modifying templates

Add the remainder of your products as per steps 17 through 19. You'll find your product template at the bottom of the pull-down menu. If certain items do not share all the same options, you can opt to customise your template for that item only, removing the options in the Template editor

26 Testing your store

It is possible to see the results of your labour at any time by pressing the 'Preview Changes' button at the top of the 'Administrator' window. This returns you to the main screen which also doubles as a browser window. All of the functions, including cart are functional for offline testing. Have a play around with them.



27 Set your FTP details

When you've finished designing and thoroughly tested your shop, press the 'Publish to Web' button on the top toolbar. Enter your FTP address, username and password in boxes provided on the left-side of the dialog. Choose 'Upload New/Modified files' and press 'Next' to connect.

28 Put it online

EROL will then make a list of all the files that have been recently modified (all of them with your first upload). Once successfully connected, your files will be uploaded automatically. It'll then open Internet Explorer and take you to your uploaded site to make sure it's all there.

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- **Latest version of Perl**
- **Microsoft Frontpage Extensions**
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Sell to the whole world!

Is your online business ready for global customers? **Roland Waddilove** explains how to sell your products to a wider audience

A high street store may attract shoppers from an area a couple of miles across, but as the distance increases so the number of visitors decreases. Picking the right location is one of the most important features of a bricks and mortar business. Sell via mail order and you increase the area covered, but you probably won't reach customers beyond our shores. What's more, advertising your wares abroad can be expensive.

Thankfully, none of this applies to eCommerce. One of the greatest advantages of setting up shop online is its global reach – a reach that cannot be matched by traditional methods of selling. On the Internet, your store is just a mouse click away from anyone anywhere in the world. A visitor to your store's site may come from just down the road or from across the other side of the globe, but are you prepared for international customers? What do you need to do to cope with overseas sales?

You really need to sit down and think this through because if you have an online store, you must expect orders to come from anywhere in the world. So you have to decide whether you are going to sell to customers abroad. What will you do if orders arrive? Ignore them? If you accept them, what about VAT and shipping? Can you cope with sales to other countries or can you only supply to UK customers?

There should be a clear statement of your sales reach on your home page or where it can easily be found. You should say exactly who is eligible to buy your goods, which countries you deal with, the currencies you accept, where you can ship goods to, how long it might take, what the cost may be and so on. It takes some planning, but once you have decided to accept overseas sales, you have instantly increased your potential customers by a few tens of millions.

Speaka de lingo?

An immediate barrier to potential global sales is language. Your site is in English, but apart from the US, Australia and a few other countries, it is not the first language. French visitors may immediately leave when they discover that there is no French version of the online store. If you are really dedicated to servicing global visitors, you may need to create two, three or more versions of your site and provide a menu to select the visitor's language. Of course, this can double the time and cost to develop the store.

One possible solution worth considering is Babel Fish, which is a translation service offered by AltaVista. Go to **www.altavista.com** and select the 'Translate' link. You can type in a paragraph of text and instantly see it in any one of several different languages, or you can supply a URL and it will translate the Web page it finds there. Although this sounds great, you shouldn't rely on it. You really need to get a native speaker of the language to proofread your Web pages.

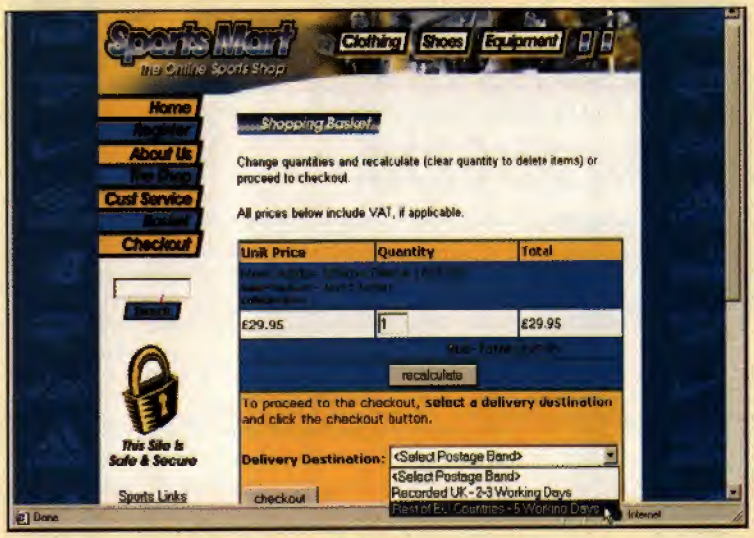
Another point worth bearing in mind is that online shoppers like to buy goods from a site registered in their own country. For instance, UK shoppers flock to .co.uk sites and are wary of sites with unusual URLs because of the potential for fraud. To reassure foreign customers you might need to register a domain name in several different countries, such as .fr (France), .com (US), .au (Australia), .de (Germany) and so on.

Global advertising

As soon as you enter your Web site into a search engine, anyone in the world will be able to find it by going to that engine. However, the search sites that you use every day are for English speaking people and if you live in France, for example, you might use a search engine in French or one that was specific to France, French products and companies. You therefore need to seek out these foreign language search engines and make sure that your site is added to them.

The most common form of advertising on the Internet is through banners. You can buy space on specific Web sites, and it is also possible to buy keywords on Yahoo! so that when someone searches for a particular keyword, your advert is displayed on the results page. This can be expensive and if your marketing budget is quite small, it might make more sense for you to join one of the free advertising banner exchange schemes. You can find a list of over 350 at the Banner Exchange Megalist and there are more schemes to be found at Adbility. More information about banners can be found at Banner Tips.

Banners aren't the only way of advertising on the Internet. For example, you could sponsor an email newsletter or a



Is your shop ready for global sales? Your shopping cart will need to distinguish between UK, EC and non-EC customers

ONLINE RESOURCES

Translation services
www.altavista.com
www.foreignword.com/Tools/transnow.htm
www.11design.com/transguide

Banner exchange schemes
www.bxmegalist.com
www.adbility.com/ba_exchange.htm
www.bannertips.com

General information
www.hmce.gov.uk/notices/imp-exp.htm
www.businessadviceonline.org
http://sellitontheweb.com

Payment processing
www.securetrading.com
www.worldpay.com/uk
www.netbanx.com

Shopping carts
www.actinic.co.uk
www.get-trolleyed.co.uk
www.evolve2000.net
www.multiactive.com

Shipping
www.ups.com/europe/gb/engindex.html
www.dhl.co.uk

One of the greatest advantages of setting up shop online is its global reach

Localise your Web site by translating it into the language of the target country

Make your site global!

Advertise globally by joining one of the free banner exchange schemes at the Free Banner Exchange Megalist

TOP TIPS

- Ensure that you never take credit card details by any method that's insecure, such as email.
- Choose a payment service provider that has both high encryption levels and a fraud control system, so you know your customers details are being protected.
- If you're using a shopping cart solution, ensure that you choose a well-known product that has no security glitches or bugs.
- Let your customers know on your home page that that your site is secure. Provide them with as much information about the security you use as you can – they'll be more likely to stay and return.
- Keep monitoring your transactions and be sensible. Get either an email address or a phone number from your customer so that if you're unsure about an order you can contact them to confirm the details – you'll soon find out if it's bogus. Also, by watching your transactions you'll get a better idea of who's buying on your site, which country they're from, what their buying and when.
- Consider offering an alternative to credit card payment, such as cash.

Web site. You could advertise directly on a newspaper's Web site, too. The price varies a great deal and you will frequently hear the term CPM, or cost per thousand. This means that the price is based on the number of times the advert is served up on the Web pages of visitors to the site. Although the CPM is low, the price can be high if the site carrying the advert generates a lot of traffic.

Online payments

In order to take credit card orders through your Web site you need to have an Internet merchant account with one of the big high street banks. If you are about to apply for one, you may find it more difficult to get accepted if you intend to sell your wares globally. This is because the risk of credit card fraud is much higher when dealing with overseas customers.

You may find that the charges for this type of account are more than for a high street store and that again is related to the risk. You should be aware that you are 100 per cent responsible for the cost of credit card fraud. If a thief obtains credit card details and then uses it to buy lots of goods from your site, its just tough luck. It's your loss. You therefore need to take care when taking orders.

At the moment, only NatWest and Barclays allow multicurrency trading over the Net

Secure Trading accepts credit card payments for you, authorises the sale, checks for fraud, and forwards the money to your bank account

The number of foreign currencies you can process depends upon the bank you choose. At the moment only NatWest and Barclays allow multicurrency trading over the Internet. You will also need to sign up with an online payment processing company like Secure Trading. It has a sophisticated built-in fraud control system that monitors all of your site's transactions for patterns of suspicious activity. It can also authorise payments and transfer the money to your merchant bank account.

What to look out for

It's wise to be suspicious of orders that are placed from free Web-based email accounts like Hotmail because anyone can set them up. International credit card orders are more likely to be fraudulent and you should be wary of orders from Russia, Nigeria, Romania, Hungary, Mexico, Egypt, the Philippines and Indonesia. In these cases you might not want to ship the goods until the payment has cleared. Your customers won't like it, but at least you won't get ripped off. Thieves also want to get the goods and disappear quickly so watch out for rush orders. Check that the shipping address is a proper street address. When selling to US customers you could ask for a telephone number and with this you can discover the street address using the directory at **www.reversephonedirectory.com**.

Does your Web site display all its prices in Euros? It should if you are selling your goods to EC member countries. Not all EC countries have adopted the Euro, ourselves included, so you might also want to display or link to a currency converter so that visitors can see the

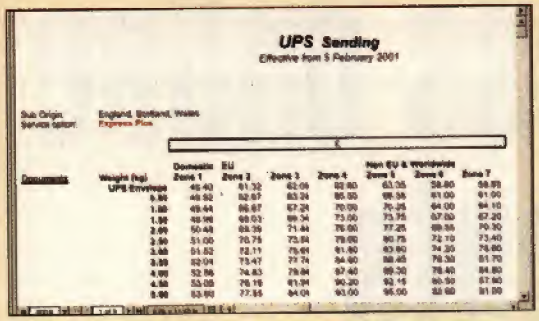
price of the goods in their own currency. It all adds to the complication of selling globally.

Taxing times

As with most retail ventures, you have to think about tax and if your turnover is more than about £50,000, you should be VAT registered. In the UK you do not have to charge VAT on goods you sell to a VAT-registered business. However, you must charge VAT if you sell goods to private individuals. The same rules apply when you sell to customers in EC member countries. However, exports to non-EC countries should be zero-rated for VAT purposes. This means that there is one rule for EC members and another rule for non-members and the rest of the world. The following countries are EC members: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the Isle of Man.

Your shopping cart software must determine where the customer lives and apply VAT or not as appropriate to that country's tax rules. Shipping charges will also vary and the more options your site's software provides, the better. You will almost certainly have one charge for UK and another for overseas customers, but you might also want to vary the charge according to region or shipping method.

There is further complication for online stores that are really successful and that is that once the value of your sales to any EC member exceeds the distance selling threshold of that member, you are liable to register in that member state. In other words, each EC member has a sales figure, which if you exceed means that you must register with its fiscal authority. You therefore need to keep records of sales to each EC member and know the threshold at which you must register. However, if you're selling so much that you need to register, you're probably already a dot com millionaire!



Check out the cost of shipping your goods globally at the UPS Web site

Shipping the goods

Shipping your goods to UK customers is fairly straightforward, but it is not quite so simple for overseas orders. If you supply fresh fruit and vegetables, for example, there is little point in going global. The goods may perish in transit, the shipping costs will increase the price and local suppliers will undercut you. You will have a greater chance of success if your products are hard to find in the target country and this will mean that customers are willing to wait a few days for delivery and pay the extra cost of global shipping.

Before considering selling globally you should investigate the shipping costs and these will need to be entered into your shopping cart software. You may need three or more charges, such as UK, Europe, and the rest of the world. If your goods are different sizes then this will also need to be taken into consideration. A visit to the DHL and UPS Web sites will provide you with the information you need. □

JARGON BUSTER

Banner advert
This is the letterbox shaped advert that appears at the top of many Web pages. There are specific sizes for them that you have to stick to.

Domain name
This is the address of a Web site. You can buy a name for your store for a few pounds, such as www.onlineshopping.com

ECommerce
This is simply buying and selling online. This can be business to business (B2B) or business to consumer (B2C)

URL
This is the address of a Web site or page on a site, such as www.myshop.co.uk/specialoffers.html

HOW WE SELL FOOD HAMPERS AROUND THE WORLD...

MICHAEL JARMAN IS the owner of traditional bakers, Elizabeth Botham & Sons (**www.botham.co.uk**). He's an eCommerce veteran selling food hampers internationally and fresh bread and cakes for local delivery. The baker chose Actinic to build its online store because it provides a complete solution: Catalogue, cart, security and order processing all in one box. It is easy and fast to update the catalogue with new items and special offers, and it lets Michael keep control of his database and customer information. Actinic's end-to-end security for credit card details means he can offer a very secure shopping facility.

It took two to three weeks to set up the online store and it is hosted by Onyx Internet (**www.onyx.net**). Orders are protected by Actinic's encryption and then downloaded and processed in-house using a PDQ system. Michael reckons that shipping overseas via ParcelForce is as easy as UK deliveries. However, you have to be aware of local food regulations, for example Australia bans the import of lemon curd because it's an egg-based product, so a substitute is required, like marmalade.

Michael is always ultra cautious about orders from Eastern block countries based on actual experience. He rings the bank to check the card number. More often than not the card is declined. Gut feeling is used to spot fraud and dodgy credit card orders, for example, where an order is for multiple hampers to one address when it's usual to only order one as a gift.

Michael Jarman is the owner of traditional bakers, Elizabeth Botham & Sons

Elizabeth Botham & Sons sells its hampers all over the world from the online store

Painless online payments

Online training prover iLearn.To explains why it uses WorldPay to handle its online transactions

ONLINE RESOURCES

iLearn.to
www.iLearn.To

WorldPay
www.worldpay.com/uk

Taking payments online through your Web site can be a tricky and time-consuming service to set up. However, if you are careful, this needn't be the case, as online training service provider, iLearn.To, found out.

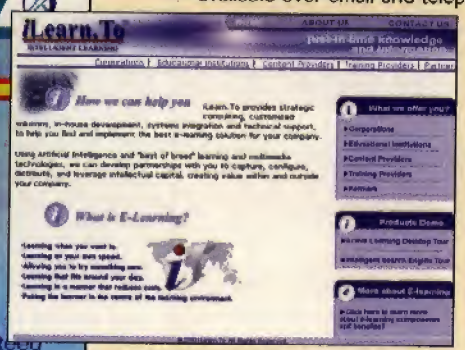
It offers a huge range of IT and management training courses, all of which can be signed up for online. Not only can customers select and enrol in their chosen course over iLearn.To's Web site, but they can also pay for it online through WorldPay's secure payment processing facility.

With a choice of over 500 courses, iLearn.To's online education service offers the chance to learn and train via the Internet from the comfort of a home or office. Focusing on IT and management, courses range from lessons on browsing the Net to advance IT skills and business planning.

For a fee of £175, users are provided with an Active Learning Account which includes an email address and over 500 interactive, online courses for 12 months.

An intelligent search engine is being developed using artificial intelligence from Autonomy software. The engine personalises the learning experience of individuals, pushing relevant knowledge and information to the learner. At the same time, it puts individuals in touch with a community of like-minded people by keeping a close profile of the individual's interests and learning achievements.

WITH A CHOICE OF OVER 500 COURSES, iLEARN.TO OFFERS THE CHANCE TO LEARN AND TRAIN VIA THE NET



When you run an online business, it's imperative that you have a secure payment system

Small beginnings

When iLearn.To was established in April 2000, the service was offered on a smaller scale at no charge through a working partnership with Campaign for Learning, a charity organisation promoting lifelong learning.

However, with a small staff and rapidly expanding database of clients, iLearn.To needed to become an eBusiness, rather than an eService, and began to look for a company to handle online payments.

WorldPay set up its Internet trading account within weeks. Myco Dean, Director and Chief Learning Officer of iLearnTo, said: "The criteria for the system-compatible software and hardware weren't at all complicated so it all went very smoothly."

WorldPay has created systems that enable Internet card payments in over 130 currencies. It currently has partners and customers in more than 80 countries worldwide. Its services include credit and debit card processing, card fraud protection for both eTailers and customers with The WorldPay Guarantee, and eCommerce online store building.

Since WorldPay also offers a technical support service available over email and telephone, Myco was confident that his site would not become inundated with problems. "We've found WorldPay's support service extremely helpful. We get responses within hours of raising a query," he said.

WorldPay's eTailing facility is clearly working out well for the site. Some 2,000 users are honing their IT skills every day from their home or office. □

Boost your business with a website

Virgin biz.net

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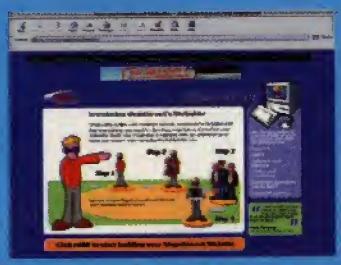

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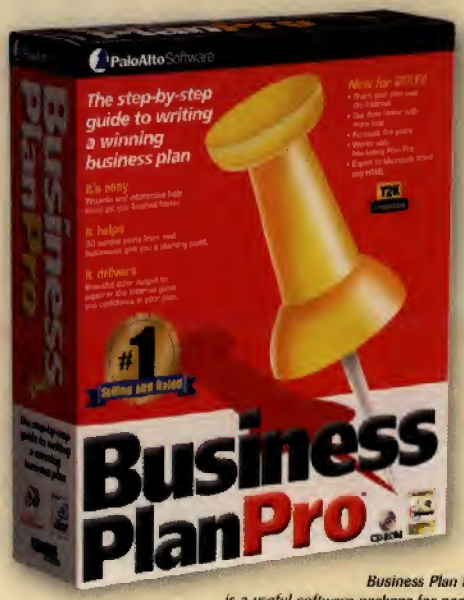
Help!

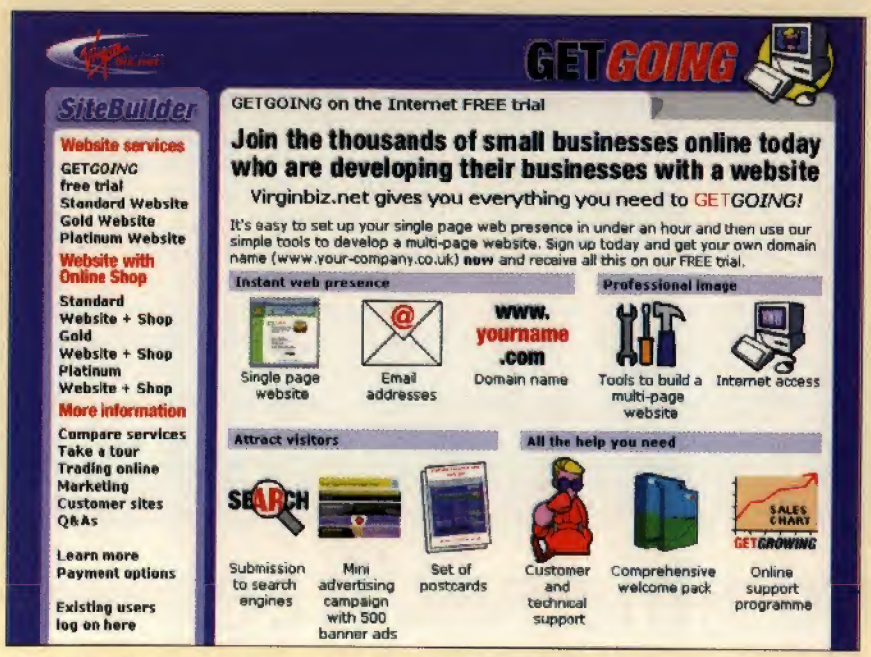


Business Plan Pro is a useful software package for people drawing up their business plan

Starting and running your online business on a tight budget is a daunting prospect. **Mark Newman** shows you where to find free help online

Whether you're the owner of a small online business or an entrepreneur considering starting one, you probably have lots of things to worry about – from cashflow and marketing to sales, accounts and shipping. Since it's unlikely you'll be an expert in any of these areas, you need help.

Turning to a professional consultant is an option, but it will end up costing you time and money. A better route is to use the Net and let it do the work for you. You'll not only get access to highly useful, relevant material, but may well get it for free. A wide range of online services cater for every level of eCommerce user – from those taking their first few steps who need to draw up a business plan, deal with tax and manage paperwork, to more advanced users who want to expand their business, enter new markets and introduce new marketing plans.



A complete toolkit for starting your e-business is on offer at VirginBiz (www.virginbiz.net)

Getting started

An excellent place to start is the government's official eCommerce site, UK Online, at **www.ukonlineforbusiness.gov.uk**. It offers a huge range of advice covering every aspect of setting up and running your e-business, with excellent features on the technical issues involved, the benefits of trading online and a good number of case studies on successful companies.

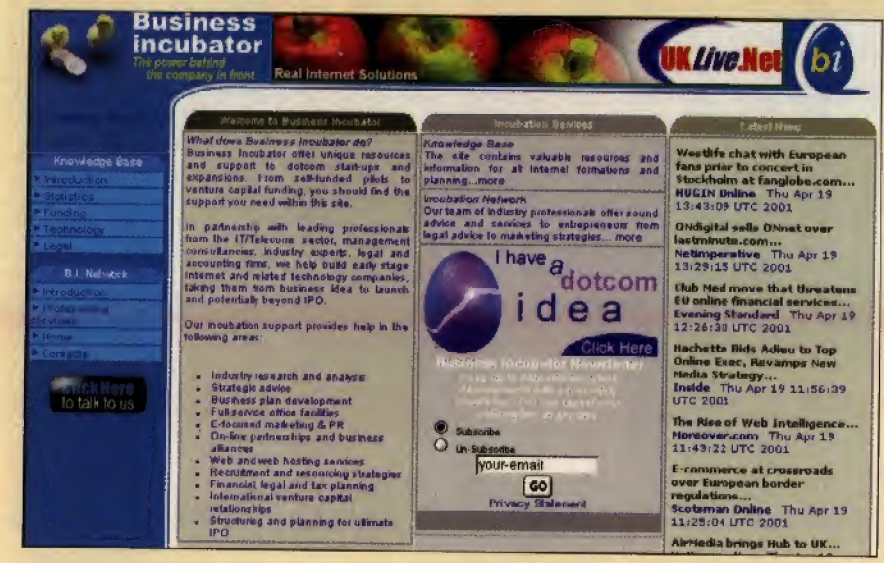
If you want to hear advice from experts and get the chance to talk over your plans with them, see the list of E-business Events (**www.ukonlineforbusiness.gov.uk/Benefits/beneventsframe.htm**) being held across the UK.

To better understand the finances involved with Web trading, find out more about the tax consequences of trading online at the Inland Revenue's site at **www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/e-commerce/sme1.htm**. These pages are essential reading an give you practical advice about the tax obligations of businesses trading electronically, whether using the Internet for advertising, the placing and receiving of orders, or making and receiving payments.

Another top eCommerce sites that's well worth visiting is VirginBiz (**www.virginbiz.net**), which offers help for small businesses and provides an easy-to-use service for setting up a business, creating Web pages, buying domain names and marketing. It also comes bundled with free Internet access from VirginNet.

Among the other recommended resources are Yell (**www.yell.com**), which provides dozens of free start-up briefings, SmallBiz (**www.smallbiz.uk.com**), for its practical help in running your small business, and EnterpriseZone (**www.enterprisezone.org.uk**) which offers visitors an extensive library of business information and links.

For a site dedicated to entrepreneurs like yourself, try EntreWorld (**www.entreworld.org**), a



Want money to get your business off the ground? Visit Business Incubator (www.businessincubator.co.uk)

charity that's dedicated to helping entrepreneurs. It provides masses of concise features pulled from other commercial and academic sites and covers how to start, manage and make the most of your business.

Creating your business plan

With the idea for your store starting to taking shape, you now need to draw up a firm business plan for it. This

A business plan spelling out the benefits of your site and profit projections is essential

details your strategy, business model and targets for sales, turnover, profits and overheads. When you open your business bank account or ask for a loan, you'll need to produce a good plan.

While it isn't particularly difficult to map out your plan using a word processor, you'll probably need some help in tackling some of the points that need to be included. To help with this, you can download a template or grab some software.

Bplans (**www.bplans.com**) covers just about every aspect of the subject, including how to start a plan, what a good plan looks like, how to test your assumptions,

Get expert advice on managing your online business from Web Venturer at www.microsoft.com/uk/webventurer

and how to create a marketing plan. Its selection of sample plans at **www.bplans.com/sp/index.cfm?a=bc** makes interesting reading.

BusinessTown (**www.businesstown.com/planning/creating.asp**) is another must-visit with its thorough coverage and jargon-free advice. Also see BizPlanIt at **www.bizplanit.com/vplan.htm** for more.

It's may also be worth considering buying Business Plan Pro 4.0, an easy-to-use software package costing $99 (approx £70). It's available from **www.paloalto.com/ps/bp** and makes creating a site much more simple.

Need some money?

While it's true that the bulk of investors are shying away from Internet start-ups at the moment, you can still raise money for your idea if you have a unique enough idea that has very clear money-making scope. There are numerous sites which aim to successfully link up investors and entrepreneurs to help them get the cash they need.

Although you're unlikely to raise millions of pounds, a few thousand can still mean the difference between life and death for your business. This is where a concise business plan spelling out the benefits of your site and your profit projections is essential.

Business Incubator (**www.businessincubator.co.uk**) is a perfect starting point. Click the 'I Have A Dotcom Idea' button on the front page to be guided through the process of how to start it and what you need.

Find Your Angel (**www.findyourangel.com**) is another useful resource. Its forums are apparently read by numerous investors and consultants who are on the look-out for new projects. They may well become interested in yours if you pitch it correctly.

The British Venture Capital Association (**www.bvca.co.uk**) also provides lots of advice and figures, while First Start Up (**www.firststartup.com/services.html**) offers an overview of money sources.

Running your business

With your business now taking shape, it's time to think about how you will manage your new company. You may intend to run it yourself on a very low budget without any staff – that's undoubtedly the cheapest way – but there are still issues to consider here.

Microsoft's superb Web Venturer (**www.microsoft.com/uk/webventurer**) explains for free the business processes of running your own site, including logistics and fulfilment, payments and billing, knowing your customers, analysing site statistics and even content management. The case studies of successful companies makes for particularly interesting reading (even if they do heavily promote Microsoft's products!).

The Alliance of Consultants (**www.allianceofconsultants.com**) helps you find a consultant for your new project or help run the business more effectively, while the Training SuperSite (**www.trainingsupersite.com**) contains a mammoth selection of training, research and support documents to help improve your skills.

For general business management advice visit management guru Peter Drucker's online presence at **www.drucker.com**, a non-profit site containing some of his articles, practical advice and reports.

Promotion and marketing of your Web site is vital to get a constant flow of visitors

Promote your business for free using Banner Exchange (www.bannerchange.com) and get your banner ads online

If your business really takes off and you can't handle demand – or if you need someone with technical expertise – there are plenty of recruitment sites available. Try Freelance Work Exchange (**www.freelanceworkexchange.com**) for getting occasional employees, Silicon.com (**www.silicon.com**) for highly technical staff, NewMonday (**www.newmonday.com**) for staff from across Europe.

Promoting your site

Promotion and marketing of your Web site is vital to get a constant flow of visitors trekking through it (and hopefully spending some money).

Design your site an ad banner using Bannershop GIF Animator, which was free on the cover CD of *Practical Internet* issue 53 (order a back copy by calling **01202 200200**). Then get your ad online and showing on other business sites for free at Banner Exchange (**www.bannerexchange.com**) which lets you store up to three banner ad designs and get free statistics on who's clicking them.

Getting your site listed on as many search engines and online directories is also important. Bring Me Hits (**www.bringmehits.com**) helps you get listed on hundreds of thousands of Web sites, while Web Search (**http://websearch.about.com**) is an excellent promotional reference site for beginners. Find out who's linking to your site by using the free service at Link Popularity (**www.linkpopularity.com**). To guarantee a high ranking on search engines you may want to pay a company like Web Search Workshop (**www.websearchworkshop.co.uk**) to get you listed. This isn't cheap, but the rewards can be high.

Find out who's visiting your site – and how many Web users are visiting – by placing an invisible counter on it. Use the excellent The Counter (**www.thecounter.com**) for access to constantly updated statistics.

Another useful promotional tool is a press release to inform publications around the world about your new business. You can send your press release for free to thousands of journalists around the world at iDotNames (**http://idotnames.com/i/scripts/Press/step1.asp**) and Comitatus (**www.comitatusgroup.com/pr**). Remember to add *Practical Internet* to your list of contacts – we want to hear from you.

Buying or selling businesses

As your business grows with more traffic and repeat customers, your thoughts may well turn to selling your operation and turning it into cash.

Alternatively, if you don't like the idea of starting your own business and prefer to take on an existing company, a visit to some of these sites is a must.

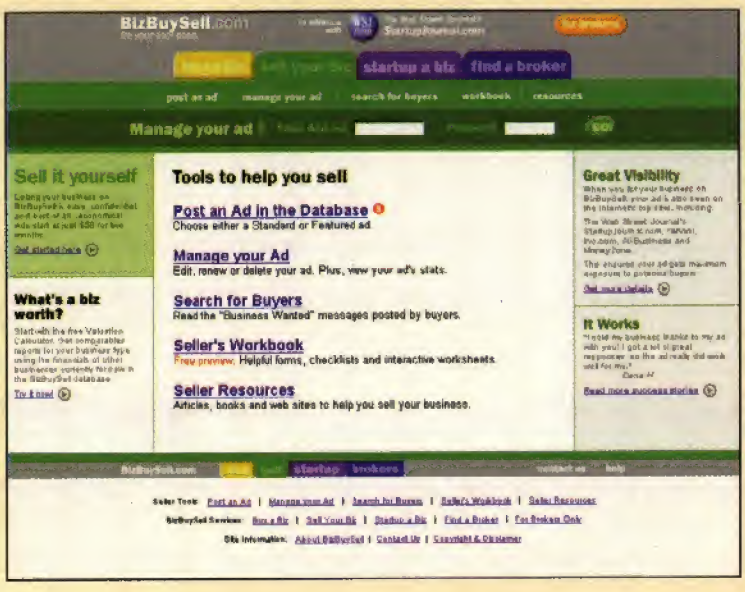
BizBuySell (**www.bizbuysell.com**) provides just about the biggest database of businesses and franchises online. There is also plenty of advice, useful support groups and also sample paperwork to help you make the right business choice.

For more UK specific sites, see Daltons (**www.daltons.co.uk**) for business opportunities, premises and franchises or Exchange and Mart (**www.exchangeandmart.co.uk**) to read a huge number of business classifieds.

You might also want to see Business For You (**www.business4u.com**), Businesses For Sale (**www.businessforsale.com**) and BizTrader (**www.biztrader.com**) which all have US slants with the odd international company thrown in for good measure!

The Net is a superb resource of business advice and you'd be foolish to fork out your hard-earned cash on this when quality material is available for free. Instead, plough your resources into designing an attractive and interesting site. Remember that is your business' shop window where first impressions are so important. □

Once it's profitable, sell your business on at BizBuySell (www.bizbuysell.com)



FREE CONTENT FOR YOUR SITE

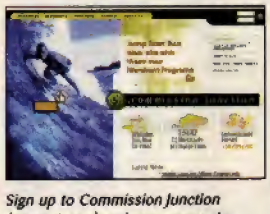
To make your site 'sticky' and guarantee repeat visitors, it's important that you offer regularly updated content.

Bring Me Hits (**www.bringmehits.com**) and IT News (**www.it-news.com/freecontent.htm**) are excellent resources for finding free content for your site – from articles and news to polls, forums and games.

If you want to display quality ad banners on your site that earn you money when people click them, then TradeDoubler (**www.tradedoubler.com**) and Commission Junction (**www.cj.com**) are essentials. You can sign up for as many affiliate schemes as you wish or choose only the ones offering products relevant to your business.

To add a constantly updated news feed to your site, see Moreover (**www.moreover.com**) which provides an amazing 322 feeds for free! You can quickly sign up and receive the HTML code to paste onto your Web page in a matter of minutes.

To make your site searchable, so that users can find products and other details on it, sign up to Picosearch (**www.picosearch.com**) or Atomz (**www.atomz.com**) – both of which are completely free and are easily configurable.



Sign up to Commission Junction (www.cj.com) and earn money by displaying ad banners on your site

Add a forum to your store

How to: Add a customer forum to your Web site to let buyers comment about your products and service

STICKINESS IS AN essential part of an online shop. You want people to visit, to browse, to create an ambience. Sure, you can rotate stock, make special offers etc, but people respond best to the personal touch – communication.

By providing a forum for existing and prospective customers, you enable your site visitors to form a community. A forum is especially effective for anyone offering a niche or specialist service online.

A forum enables you to gauge customer satisfaction and suggests new business opportunities. It provides ongoing interest and tempts customers to consider new buys. A forum also enables you and your customers to meet and provide mutual support. Customer support – from you and your visitors – establishes a personal relationship. A well designed and effectively moderated forum is a powerful sales tool.

There are many forums available for those with server access though fewer for those using free Web space. Ezboard – **www.ezboard.com** – is particularly excellent.

JARGON BUSTER

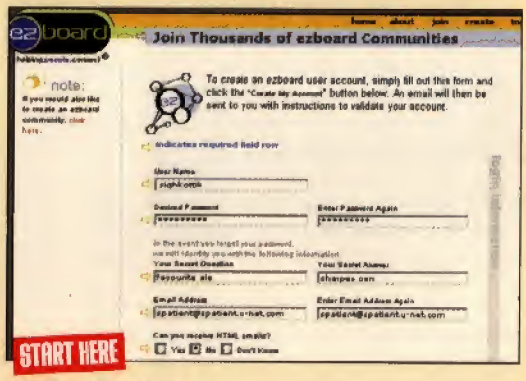
Forum
A real or virtual place where people can make their voice heard. Usually refers to asynchronous communication rather the immediacy of a chat room

Posting
The act of sending a comment to a forum. In the case of Web based forums this usually involves entering your comments into a Web form

Topic
A specific point under discussion in the forum. You can reply to topics or start a new one

Thread
A collection of postings organised by date and time on a topic. Most forums enable you to follow a discussion topic

Flame Bait
A posting designed to attract flames

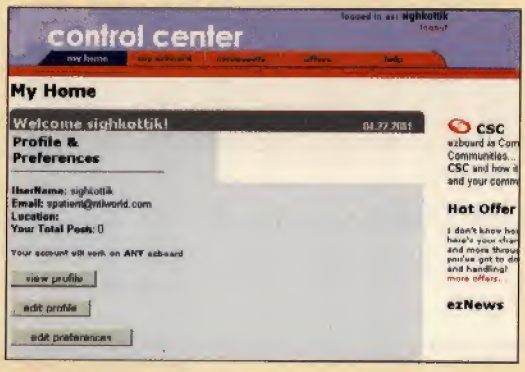


1 Signing up

Ezboard operates a variety of signup options. For free you see ad banners and pop up ads, for $14 per year you are ad and pop up free. Forum providers pay for various levels of ad free status depending on usage rates, from around $60 a year. Check the Community tab for rates.

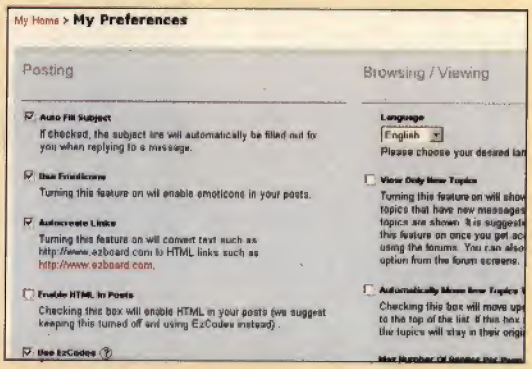
2 Ezboard home

Ezboard sends a confirmatory email after you sign up. You can use your new account to log in on the home page. From here you can also access other ezboard forums whether you're signed up or not. This is the normal route into the ezboard system.



3 Logging in

When you log in you're at My Home in your Control Centre, with tabs for various activities. From here you set and preview your personal preferences and profile as well as add ezboard favourites. The first thing to do is set your preferences.



4 Setting preferences

The preferences section provides access to a wide range of options including adding personal icons and photographs. More important, though, is the way you want your forums to work. For example, allowing HTML, showing all posts, post ordering, activating links in posts and so on.

5 Fame at last

Some features enabled or disabled in Preferences must to be set up to work. For example, if you opt to use a photo in postings you need an image available on the Web. 60 x 60 pixel images are favourite. You might want to use someone else's photo if you look as bad as this.

6 Create a community

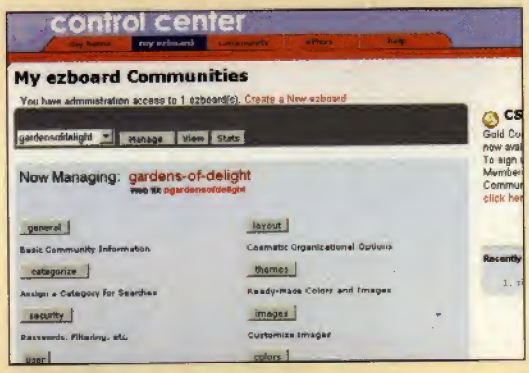
The first time you click on the My Ezboard tab you get this screen, a wizard leading you through the process. Just follow it and fill in the details. On subsequent log ins you'll go straight to your Community page skipping the set up wizard.

TOP TIP

Forums and chat rooms
For a commerce site, a forum is of more use than a chat room. A chat room is too immediate with everything happening in real-time. A forum is more like a newsgroup where postings have longevity and a thread structure, making them more useful. By the way, don't create multiple forums unless your visitors demand it. Visitors meet less and you end up with less activity. There's rarely a reason for a second forum.

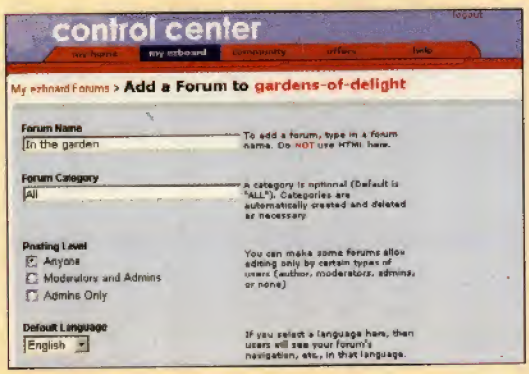
7 Community details

After supplying your ID and password you can create a community by naming it and create a forum within it in the same way. You can add search keywords. Ezboard is keen to ply you with offers so un/check those boxes with care. Note that you can edit details such as forum names later.



8 The Control Centre

Once you've created a community you go to your Control Centre when you log in. From here you manage your community. Lower down the page is management for individual forums. In fact, from Control Centre you can add, rename, delete, moderate and customise forums.



9 More forums

Forums can be added and their features edited at any time. Here we're creating a new forum from our Control Centre. It's open to anyone to post in as we want to link to it from our e-tail site. Forums can be member only or even secret, though this isn't advisable for eCommerce.

10 Categories

In order for your forums to be discovered by people arriving via ezboard rather than your site provide keywords and add it to at least one category. Our fictitious site selling rare plants is in Home/Gardens/Plants as well as other relevant categories. Don't forget to turn them ON in Preferences.

TOP TIP

Instant Messaging
Ezboard supports a variety of instant messaging and email posting methods, which we haven't gone into . For an e-tail site, though, you want visitors – most of whom will find it via your site rather than the ezboard site. You can also mass email registered forum users with offers and invitations. There's always a trade off between keeping it simple to encourage visitors and creating sales opportunities.

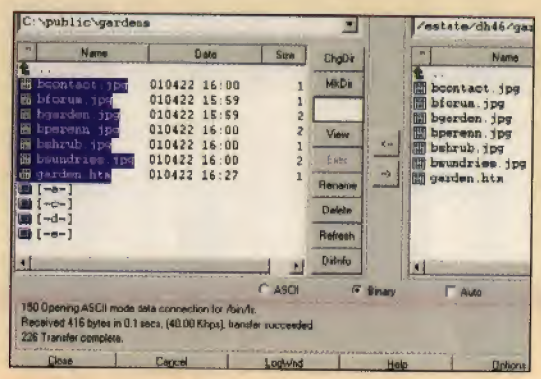
TOP TIP

HTML in email

We deselected HTML in postings and disallowed images larger than 60 x 60 in our forums to keep them tidier, more secure and most importantly, more responsive. In general, visitors to a forum want to make and read comments. HTML and images clutter the screen, confuse the issue and slow the forum. Keep it simple for maximum effectiveness.

11 Integrating an ezboard

Our ezboard isn't standalone – it's going to look and act like part of our eCommerce site. To do this you need some suitable HTML. This page in FrontPage shows no buttons because they have absolute, not relative, Net addresses and so aren't available when they're offline.

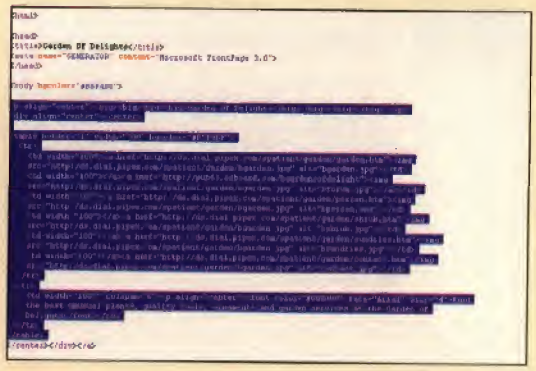


12 Uploading

Having designed the page we're uploading it along with the button graphics and other content using WS_FTP (or whatever FTP client you prefer). The site itself is located at Pipex (UUNet) while the forum continues to be hosted at ezboard. The trick is to make all this appear seamless.

13 Checking your site

Here we've accessed the new page at Pipex and the buttons are working fine. Each has a link of the form <img src="http://www.isp.com/image.jpg" alt="image.jpg"> and will work wherever they're located on the Web.



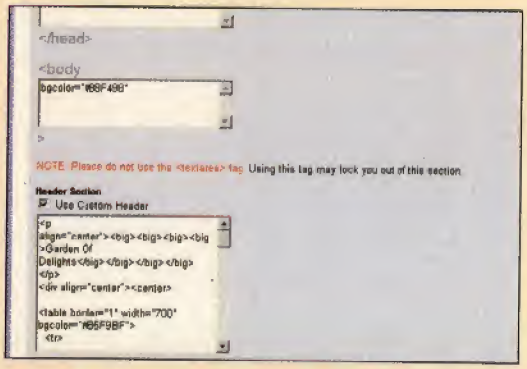
14 Get the HTML

The site is fine so copy the HTML which makes the navigation bar work straight out of the page, like so. This is going to provide most of the customisation we need for the ezboard forum. While you can write HTML directly at ezboard you won't enjoy it.

TOP TIP

To register or not to register

Ezboard forums can be limited to ezboard members, registered users or open to anyone. If your forum proves popular, it's worth having users register. It makes the community tighter, provides you with more information and gives you more control. On the downside, many Web users won't register for anything online which means you've lost them. One option is to make registration automatic with any sale and include it as a benefit with the email confirming the sale to build up a base of registered users.



15 Advanced customisation

The Control Centre Advanced button enables you to add HTML to the page. The copied HTML is pasted into the form (it's small so editing is tricky) which will add it to the top of the page body in the garden site forum. This puts the site navigation bar onto the forum page.

16 Fabulous forum

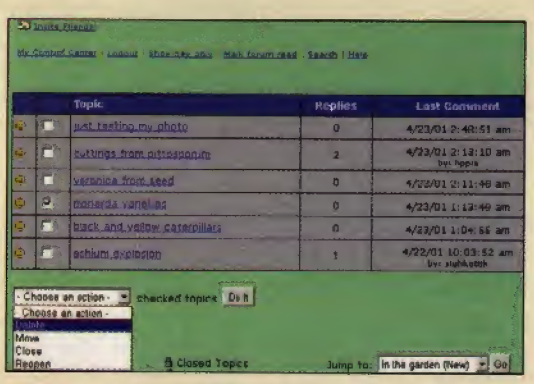
When we log into ezboard after customising the HTML, the forum looks just like a part of the main site, complete with a working navigation bar. As all the buttons and their hyperlinks are absolute addresses, they work as well here as they do on our main site.

17 Testing the forum

The photo uploaded earlier to personalise our postings is visible here in the first posting test. You might want to use a company logo as an alternative. This enables visitors to identify the company postings immediately and is a good idea as you'll probably use the forum for making offers and announcements.

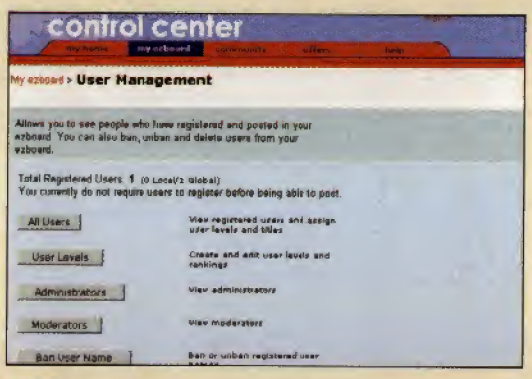
18 Control Centre revisited

Once your new forum is up and running, it's important to administer it for relevance, obscenity, selling opportunities and so on. This is done from the lower half of the Control Panel as shown here. Select a forum from the list and then click on the appropriate activity.



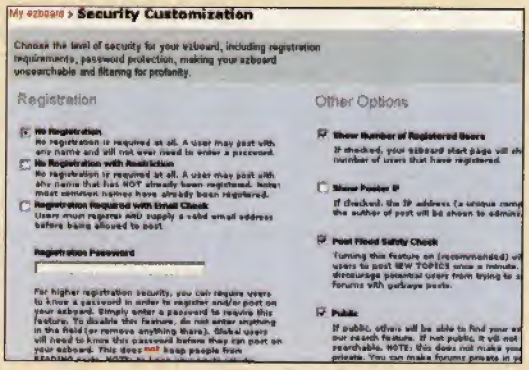
19 Topic toolkit

Each new posting is either a topic or a response to one. As an administrator or moderator you see more columns. Selected topics can be deleted, moved, closed or reopened. You can also delete or move individual replies in the same way.



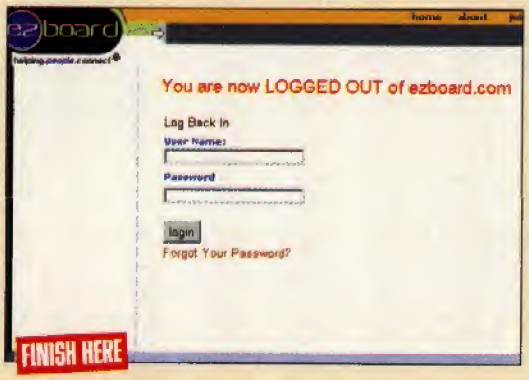
20 Keep out

There are a few irritating and deranged folk on the Net and it's important to keep them off your forums where they might upset the paying customers. You should delete their posts and ban them by name or IP address from the Users section of the Control Centre.



21 It's obscene

Use the Security section of Control Panel to determine who can post, whether they need a password (and what it is – for forums by invitation only) as well as invoking the profanity filter and/or adding your own banned words. In practice, there are too many admin features to list here.



22 Logging out

Ezboard forums provide a rich environment for users and administrators. You do need to check out all its features. One of the best is the help forum where you can find our how to do trickier stuff from long time experts. Don't forget to click on 'Logout' before leaving the site for security's sake.

TOP TIP

Integrating an ezboard
Free ezboard forums include a top and bottom banner as well as pop-up ads. These make your forum slow, clutter visitor's screens, take up space better used for your own purposes and make the forum look less a part of your e-tail site – even after customising. It's worth paying the moderate fees to show a clean forum on your site.

TOP TIP

Moderating
The main purpose of moderating a forum is to keep it on the subject. Secondary purposes include seeding it with new topics, making announcements, deleting nonsense or off topic posts and – of course – answering questions. People will believe your forum has value if you respond professionally to complaints and visitors/customers who are upset for some reason. They won't if you simply delete their posts – however tempting. People will know. Remember, you provided the forum to make contact whatever form it takes. If you're getting complaints it's your business model at fault, not your customers.

TOP TIP

Check everything
Whenever your site integrates services from another site it's important to test everything, and not just as the administrator. Come to your own site as an ordinary user and check the integrated service works correctly for everyone else. It's surprising how often this simple check picks up problems you've missed.

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Getting your store listed at online shopping malls is an excellent way of attracting targeted customers, says **Clive Hawkins**

Get listed at online shopping malls

Shopping on the Web is becoming big business in the UK. The past two years have seen an explosion of new online stores all jumping on the eCommerce bandwagon and yet making a profit still remains a considerable challenge and failure is all too common.

Launching an online store presents similar challenges to those faced in the 'real world'. Whereas 'footfall' is vital for any high street store, 'clickthroughs' are the lifeblood of an online presence, so your marketing strategy is crucial. One key area to consider is building links from other Web sites that will direct prospective customers to your site.

A vital source of such links will be from online shopping malls. These Web sites are compiled directories of online shops covering a broad range of categories. Invariably, these malls don't sell products themselves but survive as 'portals' for Web shoppers, generating high traffic volumes from which they derive revenue from advertising or ancillary services.

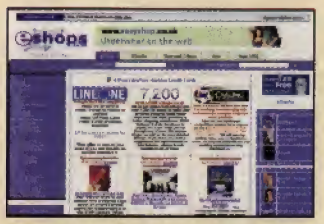
The shopkeeper's mantra – 'location, location, location' – is just as true on the Web as on the high street. In the same way that 'bricks and mortar' stores group together to attract shoppers, the same is true for online malls. These offer an excellent starting point for Web shoppers to find the type of stores they require.

Shopping lists

Some of the largest online malls contain a huge collection of links to stores, organised by product category. Although new shoppers may begin with popular search engines or directories, such as Yahoo!, their lists of UK-based stores can be limited, or quickly become dated.

British Shopping (**www.british-**

*Getting your store listed at British Shopping (**www.british-shopping.com**) is essential. It claims to be the biggest directory of UK shops*



JARGON BUSTER

Online shopping mall (or portal)
A Web site providing a directory of links to online stores.

Online store
Web sites that offer consumers the chance to buy products online.

Links
Hypertext links that instantly transfer Web users to another site.

Secure transactions
Software that encrypts credit card details to prevent their theft.

Clickthroughs
The number of users clicking a link to your Web site.

Keywords
Common search words that are used by potential customers to find Web sites.

THE SHOPKEEPER'S MANTRA - 'LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION' - IS JUST AS TRUE ON THE WEB

shopping.com) claims to be the biggest collection of UK-specific shopping links with over 3,000 sites listed. It is an excellent resource for Web shoppers to find a wide range of online stores and should be one of the first places to try and get listed. Over 300 sites are submitted to this resource each month and 80% are usually accepted.

If you run a UK-based store, you can submit your site for free within one nominated category. There are additional options that you can pay for, including guaranteed positions or store marketing support. You should provide a meaningful description for your site and enter the main keywords that can be picked up by the search engine, including product or brand names.

Other similar malls include **www.ukshopsearch.com** and **www.eshops.co.uk**.

Retailer reviews

A useful development for consumers has been the appearance of online malls providing qualitative assessments of each store. These are provided by the site editors or from shoppers who can submit reviews or 'vote' on their experiences of each retailer.

BuyGuide (**www.buyguide.co.uk**) is an easy-to-use site that offers consumers a chance to browse shops by category or search using keywords. Users can also filter searches by certain criteria, such as stores offering order tracking or a loyalty scheme.

Each store listing includes a review from the BuyGuide team and graphic icons indicate a number of services offered. Qualifying for a listing is by no means guaranteed and you need to demonstrate why your store is different and what sets you apart as a unique, quality shopping experience.

There is a detailed submission form on the site that can be completed by any UK store offering secure transactions. You can add details about your service, such as delivery charges or low-price guarantees, which is made available to users who can review your entry and compare your shopping experience against similar stores before entering your site.

Other sites offering reviews include **www.kudoshops.com** and **www.1stopshopping.co.uk**.

Secure shops only

Like BuyGuide, many shopping malls will only list stores that offer secure transactions, appealing to online consumers still anxious about sending their credit card details across the Internet to pay for goods.

ShopSafe (**www.shopsafe.co.uk**) was launched in 1999 and has developed an online mall based on such consumer concerns. It only lists stores that clearly demonstrate this facility and currently includes over 700 sites organised by category. Backed by an agency that develops online stores, ShopSafe also emphasises the importance of design and highlights a 'Top Ten' list of stores that it feels demonstrate the best features of an online shopping experience, including clear navigation and fast download times.

Getting your site listed is dependent on the views of the ShopSafe editors. Only about 10% of the 200 stores submitted each month meet their selection criteria, which involves categories such as having secure credit card transactions, prominent prices and 'good' design. They also say, rather vaguely, that your site must offer a wide range of products suitable for 'high street' shoppers and demonstrate lower prices than 'regular shops'.

Other malls of secure shops include **www.safedoor.co.uk** from Securicor and Barclaycard's **www.indigosquare.com**.

Best on price

Some of the most popular online malls are those promising to find the lowest prices for products across multiple retailers. These sites give shoppers the chance to really save money on the Web by hunting out the best prices, mostly for electrical goods, music, videos/DVDs or books.

ShopSmart (**http://uk.shopsmart.com**) has become the leading player in this category and claims 500,000 visitors each month. In addition to its price comparison service, it also offers a review-based directory of secure online stores, with each entry having an independent commentary and 'star rating'. Because of the traffic volumes using ShopSmart, this is a significant site to obtain a listing on, although it's now harder to achieve since it reduced its selection to a maximum of 1,000 stores.

*1stop Shopping (**www.1stopshopping.co.uk**) is just one of many sites that offer reviews of the shops they list*

*Barclaycard's Indigo Square (**www.indigosquare.com**) guides visitors to some of the best online shops*

To get a quick idea of what shops are offering special offers, see 2020 Shops, LineOne and ShopSmart

Submitting your site is free, although you must then just sit back and hope for the best! It lists 14 conditions that your site must achieve as a minimum – many of which are also valuable guidelines for setting up a quality online store. In addition to these, however, your site will be reviewed and rated on ease of use, product range, customer service and quality of shopping experience.

Other price comparison sites include **http://uk.kelkoo.com** and **www.dealtime.co.uk**.

This week's special offers

A number of malls feature special offers, promotions or competitions being run by Web stores. In doing so, they aim to attract regular users back to their mall by showing all the offers that can be had. It also has advantages for the shop owners, as it can be a good way of boosting your business in quieter periods or promoting special campaigns.

For a start, 2020Shops (**www.2020shops.com**) includes a directory of 2,000 reviewed shops, but also provides users with details of current special offers or store competitions. All of these are currently featured on the home page or can be included in a weekly newsletter to shoppers.

To get listed on this site you need to complete their submission form with details about your site, including features offered. The review team will add your site if it meets their criteria, but it can also benefit your listing if you can suggest a competition or price promotion for 2020Shops visitors. Then, whenever you want to boost more business in the future, simply submit a separate form to provide details of any short-term or permanent special offers and these will be considered for the site's offer pages.

Another mall featuring special promotions can be found at **www.shopandwin.co.uk**.

The Regent Street effect

Although all the previous sites covered are specifically online malls, you shouldn't ignore the major ISPs, such as Freeserve, AOL or LineOne. These portals are the starting point for thousands of Web users and they usually contain a shopping information section that can generate a huge volume of traffic.

For example, LineOne's (**www.lineone.net**) shopping section has been one of the more extensive ISP lists of reviewed online stores and with a claimed 1.9 million registered users, a listing here is immensely valuable. Having said that, LineOne is now reducing the number of stores being listed to fall in line with many of the other ISPs where resources have become entirely focussed on profit.

Getting a listing on many ISPs, therefore, will mean setting up a commercial agreement, such as advertising or some other type of revenue-sharing agreement. Unfortunately, this can favour the big-name stores as such agreements may not come cheap, but if your store can afford it, this is a traffic-building method that should not be ignored.

Other notable portals include **www.handbag.com/shopping** and **http://shopping.guardian.co.uk** (both sites currently list reviewed sites).

Variety is the spice of life

The above examples illustrate the variety of online malls available and how getting a link to your store may be easier on some than on others. Links from these malls may generate significant traffic to your site, but because many are entirely dependent on their favourable review, it can be a good idea to consider their stated criteria even before you set up your online store. These can help give you some excellent guidance on ways to make your store more effective and place you in a better position for an accepted listing once you come to submit your site.

So obtaining links from online malls is a task that shouldn't be ignored, although it can be time-consuming and requires persistence. There are professional companies that can do the job for you and advise on your chances of success, but whatever route you take, just keep repeating those favourite words, 'location, location, location'! □

*Clive Hawkins runs the Web Search Workshop (**www.websearchworkshop.co.uk**), a marketing consultancy specialising in search engine placement and helping Web sites build traffic-generating links from relevant sites.*

ONLINE RESOURCES

Office of Fair Trading
www.oft.gov.uk/html/shopping
Online shopping advice for consumers and traders, from the OFT.

Which Webtrader
www.which.net/webtrader
Build customer confidence with Which's recommended trader scheme.

Visa e-tails
www.visae-tails.co.uk
New award scheme for UK stores, offering nine winning categories.

Wilson Web: E-Commerce
www.wilsonweb.com/commerce
A US site, but contains extensive tips, advice and experience.

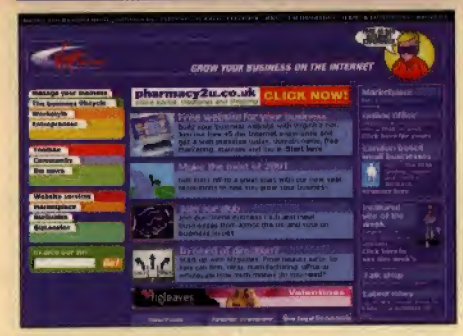
Ybag
www.ybag.com
A 'personal shopping service' where retailers can match shoppers' needs.

DooYoo
www.dooyoo.co.uk
Gives consumers a chance to sound off about online shopping.

Small Business Resources

The *Your Business Online* guide to sites that offer free eCommerce help

ECOMMERCE HELP



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WWW.YELL.COM
Download 30 start-up briefings for free

WWW.ENTERPRISEZONE.ORG.UK
Library of business information and links

WWW.BUSINESS365.CO.UK
Offering 'all your business needs' this is a handy site

WWW.SMALLBIZ.UK.COM
Get practical help for day-to-day business

GOVERNMENT HELP

WWW.LEDU-NI.GOV.UK
Northern Ireland's Small Business Agency

WWW.E-ENVOY.GOV.UK
Find out how the Government can help you

WWW.BUSINESSADVICEONLINE.ORG.UK
Legal and tax advice from the Small Business Service

WWW.UKONLINEFORBUSINESS.GOV.UK
Policy news and resources from the DTI

FUNDING

WWW.FINDYOURANGEL.COM
Find investors and consultants for your business

WWW.FIRSTSTARTUP.COM
Advice for start-ups and tips for getting funding

WWW.BVCA.CO.UK
Excellent British Venture Capital Association site

WWW.FIRSTTUESDAY.COM
Highly successful Internet funding network

ECOMMERCE NEWS

WWW.SILICON.COM
UK eCommerce news in text and video formats

WWW.ECOMMERCETIMES.COM
Get the latest eCommerce and technology news

WWW.FREENEWSFEED.COM
Put the latest news headlines on your Web pages

WWW.MOREOVER.COM
Add constantly updated newsfeeds to your site

STATS AND FIGURES

WWW.BMRB.CO.UK
Online market research for the UK

WWW.JUP.COM
Find out how the Net is

WWW.NUA.NET/SURVEYS
Internet survey results as they're released

WWW.NOP.CO.UK
Tracking survey information and Net news

MARKETING

WWW.ADVALUE.CO.UK
Handles your online advertising needs

WWW.TRADEDOUBLER.COM
Get your company noticed on the Net

WWW.IAB.NET
Ad stats, articles and news items

WWW.AFFILIATEWINDOW.COM
Make money selling other sites' products

WWW.TOPWEBSITE.CO.UK
Search engine tips and advice

UTILITIES AND SOFTWARE

WWW.FREESITE.CO.UK
Get freebies for your Web site here

WWW.TUCOWS.COM
Excellent resource for finding free software

WWW.ECIRCLE-UK.COM
Add newsletters and forums to your site

WWW.DOWNLOAD.COM
Huge depositary of downloadable programs

RECRUITMENT

WWW.FREELANCEWORKEXCHANGE.COM
US-based sites providing details of freelancers

WWW.TOTALJOBS.COM
Online recruitment and careers site

WWW.NEWMONDAY.COM
Top European recruitment site

WWW.ILEARN.TO/BT_SME-UK
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WWW.JOBSERVE.CO.UK
Leading IT recruitment service

WIN PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS

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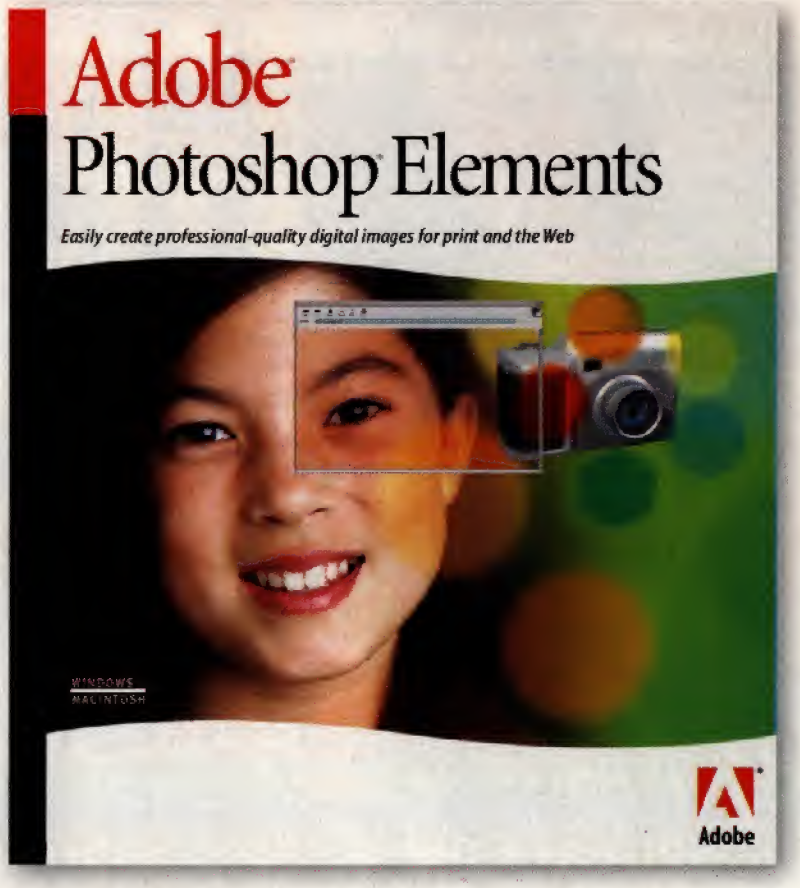

Colourful, slick graphics are an essential part of every Web site – not only helping to break up text but they also make your content easy to read and welcoming. Adobe Photoshop Elements, a new low-cost version of the world-beating graphics package, makes creating professional graphics a doddle. Packed with features, it lets you add custom 3D effects, drop shadows, bevels, and glows to text and buttons.

You can also use the excellent GIF animation tools to create animated graphics, create your own Web galleries using custom templates, and experiment with real-time image-compression controls to create quality images with minimal file sizes.

Make use of the 'Hints' feature to learn sophisticated Photoshop tools, and 'Recipes' to perform advanced image-editing techniques, such as compositing and colour correction.

The software also lets users add interesting graphic elements to Web pages using its extensive library of shapes and symbols. Also, add various effects and styles, and add and change text, fonts, and effects directly on your image without restrictive dialog boxes.

FIVE COPIES WORTH £395 TO BE WON!

Photoshop Elements also comes with a host of digital photography features to capture photos from digital or traditional cameras and start working with your images immediately. You can quickly straighten and crop your scanned photos, remove red-eye, and fix over-exposed areas with a few clicks of a mouse. Also, Adobe's Photomerge technology lets you create panoramic images in seconds. It effortlessly blends portions of multiple images together into seamless panoramas.

Priced at just £79, the software is available for PCs and Macs and helps you produce professional-quality output for print. You can incorporate graphics into printed flyers, brochures, and presentations, plus automatically generate multiple copies and sizes of a photo on a single page.

So get your entry off to us today. You won't want to miss out on winning this fantastic software giveaway.

Photoshop Elements competition entry form

To win one of the five copies of Photoshop Elements, read this page and answer this easy question:

What is the name of Photoshop Element's feature that lets you create panoramic images?

a) Photomerge
b) Photostitch
c) Photopanorama

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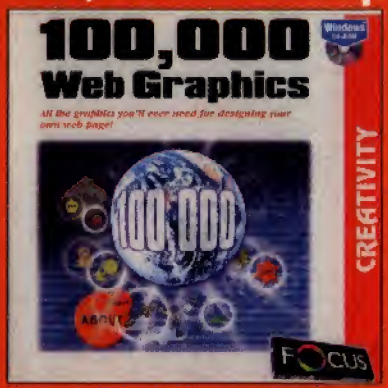

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Xoom Web Page Power Pack

You'll find virtually everything you need here to create high impact Web pages quickly and easily. It's a suite of powerful tools that let you create and maintain your Web pages like the professionals! It includes Web Snake, a set of Internet tools you can use to download a Web site for offline browsing, plus GIF Animator, an image compression tool, and Web Site Starter Kit, a collection of more than 50 complete Web sites for you to use.

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If you intend to use photos on your Web site, this stunning collection is a must. Offering a wide range of top quality, full colour images, it covers subjects as diverse as the animal world, technology, eCommerce, food and terrain. All the images are royalty-free so you can rest assured that you won't get into legal hot water over copyright. Whatever image you need is here. They're all easily accessed and can be quickly resized.

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A6 Instruction form

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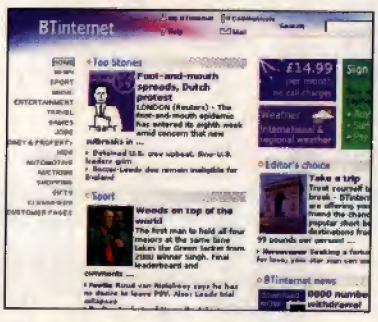
CAN'T CONNECT

Q I've been using the new BT Internet Anytime service for a month or so and I'm generally pleased with it. It seems to be pretty fast – even though it's only single ISDN – and I have always been able to get online without any problems. But since last weekend I've been unable to log on to the service at all. Every time I dial up, everything seems to be okay when the connection is made, but as soon as the 'Authentication' message appears the connection fails and I am thrown off the service. I don't really want to use a paid-for connection to try and find out what's wrong. Can you help?

Malcolm Tagg

A **After a bit of a search around the BT Internet home page I managed to find a phone number you can use to check the status of the BT Internet service. On the home page click on the 'My BT Internet' link at the top of the page and the Service Status link is on the left-hand side. Click on it and you are provided with a freephone number to call and check that the service is working correctly. It's 0800 731 7777. When I called the number I was told – in a recorded message – that the service was working correctly. The message then went on to say that if I was having trouble connecting to the service it was because BT Internet is now using Caller ID verification. This means that you have to insert the number 1470 followed by a comma before the dialling code in your dial-up networking box, so instead of the number looking like this; 0808 9933001 it should now look like this; 1470, 0808 9933001. BT Internet has recently changed all of its dial-up numbers and introduced new connection software; you can find more details on the home page at www.btinternet.com.**



Full details of all the changes to the BT Internet dial-up service can be found at www.btinternet.com

PROGRAMMER WANTED

Q I have a bit of a problem that I am sure someone of your vast PC knowledge will be able to help me with. I have been trying to find an independent computer programmer/Web wizard to help me write programs on my home PC and to carry out other software tasks on my PC, but I can never seem to find any sites or notice boards with experienced skilled people (independent of any companies) offering their services at a reasonable rate. If you do know of any in the London area or any notice boards that advertise such services, please let me know, it would be much appreciated. Yours sincerely,

Bob Bennett

A **The problem with this kind of request is that it depends on what you mean by 'reasonable rates.' I do a little freelance Web design and graphics work and I charge a minimum of £50 per hour, especially if I am creating Flash or Shockwave animations. Would you regard £50 as a reasonable rate? You're going to find that any freelance programmer or Web designer is going to charge you at least that rate and probably a hell of a lot more. What's more, you are not really clear on what you want to do. You mention writing programs for your PC, Web content and also 'other software tasks' which seems a little vague. You may be better off seeing if you can find some training courses to improve your PC skills – the other software tasks – and you can also get some Web design training. Most technical colleges (probably now universities) and Internet cafés should be able to provide the training you need.**

SCRIPT KIDDIE

Q I have just been reading through your Net Surgery pages in the April issue of *Practical Internet* and have been encouraged by the articles there to send in my own recent problem. For some reason that I can't work out, I have lost contact with a Web site because I get an error message that says 'Scripting is disabled.' I haven't changed any settings to do with scripting because I don't know how to do so. I can only conclude that some other changes have been made to their Web site software and something has messed up this scripting requirement. Can you explain what has gone wrong and what I can do to rectify the problem?

Ken Lavender

A **The scripting requirement you refer to is called JavaScript and the controls for switching it in on and off are built into Internet Explorer. It sounds like your security settings for Internet Explorer 5 have been changed in some way. It's quite simple to change the settings although it's unlikely that anything that has occurred on or been**

GET MORE FROM YOUR NET CONNECTION WITH THESE QUICK TIPS

Sometimes listening to your modem's attempt to connect to a service provider can help you track a problem. You may be connecting to a voice line instead of a modem, for instance, if you hear a person answer. You can turn on your modem's speaker by setting the options or sending the ATL3 command when initialising the modem from most communications programs. To add the command to your PC's setup, open the 'Modem' control panel, select your modem, click 'Properties', select the 'Connection' tab, click on 'Advanced' then enter the string in the 'Extra Settings' box.

SORT IT OUT

WEBCAM WANTED

Q Hi Clive, you are my last resort. I need a Webcam that provides continuously running footage and not a frame-by-frame time-lapse system. This is to be installed on a Web site. It was suggested by Logitech that I use a low budget security camera. This is where my problems start. To run the camera I need a some sort of TV and video package but nobody seems to know of one. I also understand that to view the video footage I would need a very large hard drive and also the person at the other end viewing the video would need a large drive too. Has Logitech sent me on a wild goose chase or is this possible? Do you think buying an expensive Webcam would be a better option? Please help, I'm pulling my hair out.

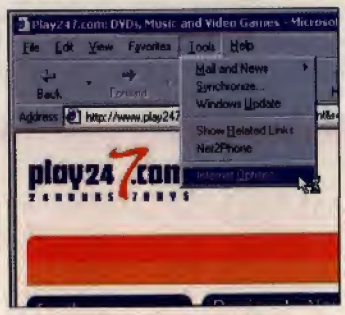
Paul Cassidy

A If you want to set up a continuous video feed over the Web you are going to need some quite high spec gear. A CCTV camera would be the best solution – you can pick up colour CCTV cameras for around £150 and provide better images than most Webcams. You will then need a PC with a video input/capture card. You can buy video capture cards from just about any computer store such as PC World or online at Jungle.com for £50 or more. You won't need a huge hard drive in the PC if you are streaming the video using something like Real Networks RealVideo server, but you will need a permanent high-speed connection using a leased line. This can be very expensive, we're talking thousands of pounds per quarter for a leased line. ADSL connections are not designed to enable Web hosting so you can't use that as an alternative to a leased line. Your best bet is a traditional time-lapse Webcam setup. You can use ADSL or ISDN connections with unlimited use connections to send images as often as one per second using a CCTV camera or a traditional Webcam. One of the best and easiest to use bits of Webcam software I've used is CoffeeCup WebCam 3.0 from **www.coffeecup.com** and a very good Webcam is the Creative WebCam Go Plus from **www.europe.creative.com** which costs about £130.

Let the world into your house! It's easy to set up a Webcam using CoffeeCup WebCam 3.0 software, and it's not too expensive

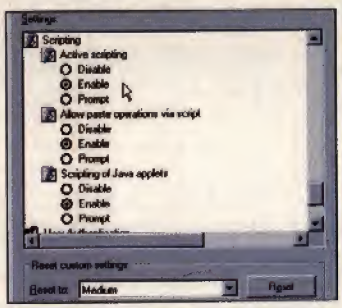
Creative's WebCam Go Plus also doubles as a digital camera

downloaded from the Web site has had anything to do with your problem. Follow these steps to make sure that scripting is enabled in Internet Explorer 5.

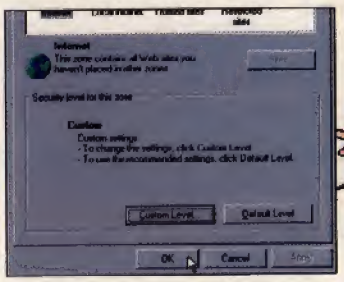


Run Internet Explorer 5 and select the 'Internet Options' command in the Tools menu.

When the Internet Options control panel opens, click on the 'Security' tab. In the Security page, click on the 'Custom Level' button near the bottom.



In the Security Settings window, scroll down the list of settings until you reach the Scripting section. There are three different options here, each with a choice of three settings. Make sure that Active Scripting, Allow Paste Operation Via Script and Scripting of Java Applets all have the 'Enable' radio button selected.



Click on the 'OK' button to exit the security settings window then click 'OK' to exit the Internet Options control panel and save your settings. Your broken Web site should now work.

FREE CALLS WORLDWIDE

Q I read in a Sunday newspaper that it is possible to make worldwide calls via software downloaded from Callserve (**www.callserve.co.uk**) and that used in conjunction with the caller's ISP package, this might mean no additional cost to the caller. I use a 24/7 all-in monthly package to connect to the Internet. So I downloaded and registered with Callserve this evening, buying a £10 credit. Having made a test call, I was disappointed to see the units had fallen from 1000 to 997. Are you able to suggest how I might adjust my settings or make a connection in a way that will indeed mean free phone calls? I would be very grateful.

Zora Li

A I've had a look at the Callserve site and it is immediately clear that it doesn't offer free calls around the world, it offers calls at a reduced rate. When you pay for your ten pounds worth of credit the price of your call is deducted from it, that's why your units have gone down from 1000 to 997, you've used three pence worth of time. By using your unmetered Internet connection you are just paying the monthly cost plus the Callserve rate to, say, Australia. But every time you use Callserve to make a call, it will be charged to your credit.

Free international calls on the Internet with Callserve? Nope, just very cheap calls

GET SMART

Q I am unable to speak because I have had a laryngotomy so I can't tell any telephone help lines what my problem is. I think that I have deleted the smart restore function on my Packard Bell. I have been told I have to use my recovery disk to restore, which scares me because it takes your computer back to its original settings. Is there any other way to fix this?

Barbara

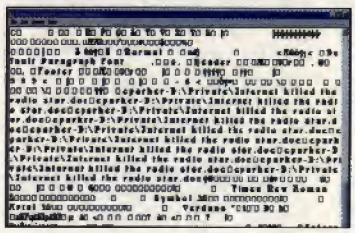
A If you have your Windows CD-ROM you should be able to reinstall or repair your installation (depending on which version of Windows you have). With Windows 98 you should be able to reinstall the operating system and retain all of your installed software, although you will lose some Windows preferences and settings. With Windows ME, you should have the option to repair Windows without affecting your settings at all. This will only work if you have the original Windows CD-ROM that came with your PC.

BIZARRE AND SURREAL

Q Some time ago I went on a course and saved some information on to floppy disk. When I look at the disk on my PC I can see all the files in Windows Explorer, but when I try to open any of them the contents look like machine code. How do I retrieve the text?

Alex Reid

A It sounds to me like you have saved the file in a word processor file format such as Microsoft Word. If you try and open this document in, say, Notepad then all of the formatting and layout information will be displayed in the page. The text is there, but you will have a lot of trouble digging it out. If the file has a .DOC file extension, that means that it is a Microsoft Word document and it can only be opened in Word. If you haven't got MS Word then you will have to open the file on a PC with the program and then save the file as a text file with a .TXT extension using the Save As command in the File menu.



If your text documents are full of gibberish then it's probably a Microsoft Word or other word processor document

SERVICE PACK 1

Q I was interested to read on page 88 of *Practical Internet* 51 the method of updating Windows. I use Internet Explorer 5.5 and would like to know what Service Pack 1 is and what it does and do I need to download it? Thank you for an excellent magazine.

David Wotton

Quick Tips

GET MORE FROM YOUR NET CONNECTION WITH THESE QUICK TIPS

Ever wanted to save a whole Web site onto your PC? The easiest method is to get an offline browser such as Web Whacker (available from **www.bluesquirrel.com**) or MemoWeb (**www.goto.fr**). These let you save text and pictures from Web sites quickly and easily. Or, if you want to save text from a site, go to the 'File' menu of your browser, select 'Save as...' and then choose 'Text'. If you want to save a photo, right click on it.

start here...

Reserve them now...

WEB PAGES made easy

Once you've figured out the basics of connecting to the Net, why not have a go at making your own Web site? Web Pages Made Easy is the magazine you need to do this. Includes packed CD of the best Web-site creation software (Windows and Mac).

Issue on sale now!

TO ORDER COPIES OR SUBSCRIBE, CALL 01202 200200

A Internet Explorer 5.5 service pack 1 and Internet Tools will upgrade your installation to the newest version. The service pack provides the latest updates and security fixes to Internet Explorer and you can use the service pack to upgrade existing versions of Internet Explorer or install it on PCs with no previous version installed. You can use Connection Manager as your default dialler when Dial-Up Networking is installed, Print Preview lets you view Web pages exactly as they'll appear when printed and there is improved support for DHTML (dynamic HTML) and CSS (cascading style sheets). Finally, the upgrade makes Internet Explorer faster and easier to use than before and comes with 128-bit encryption as standard.

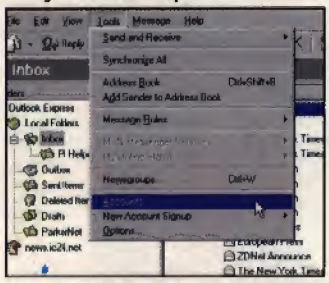
Download the Internet Explorer 5.5 service pack, you know it makes sense

WHO TO REPLY TO...

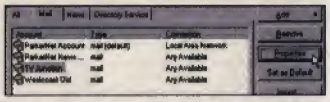
Q Dear Clive, please can you help? I am fairly good on computers, but the question of email hosting and sending is driving me mad. We are a small company who have registered our domain name televisionjunction.co.uk. A company called New Wave hosts our Web site, but it does not provide an email service – it just forwards any email that comes into info@televisionjunction.co.uk on to our CompuServe account that we currently use for email. For the good of our corporate image when we send emails out, we want it to be clear that they have come from info@televisionjunction.co.uk or whatever. But when we send them through CompuServe, the email address shows up as tvjunction@compuserve.com and if we use Outlook they still arrive with a return address at compuserve.com. Are there any companies that provide email services that completely let you use your own domain name to send emails, or do you always have to have their suffix? I have asked loads of people about this but no-one seems to know the answer, and in fact many have the same question. Or are there any stand-alone email packages that you can buy that will do this? I can find lots of sites and adverts for email forwarding services but am stumped when it comes to finding someone who can help me with queries about sending email from my end. Can you offer any advice or write a feature about this? Please help, I am slowly going mad over this problem.

Helen Griffith

A I'm surprised your service provider can't supply you with an email service for your domain name. In fact, they must be hosting your email domain because the receive email addressed to you at info@televisionjunction.co.uk. If they weren't receiving the mail they wouldn't be able to forward it to your CompuServe email account. You should contact your provider and tell them that you want to access your email account. As for making sure that your correct return email address appears in messages you send, it's quite easy to set this up.

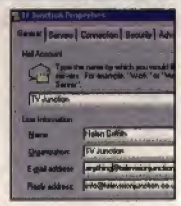


Open Outlook Express (or Outlook 97, 98 and 2000 if it's set up for Internet email) and select the 'Accounts' command from the Tools menu.



In the Internet Accounts control panel, highlight your email account in the window on the left and click the 'Properties' button on the right.

In the General tab, type the info@televisionjunction.co.uk email address into the Reply Address field. Any email address typed in this filed will appear as the address to reply to no matter what the real email address is of the account you send the email from.

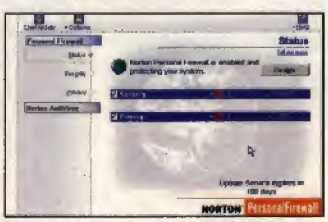


WHAT'S GOING WHERE?

Q I've noticed something strange when I download files or software from the Web. If I check the Dial-Up Networking status box, it shows me that I have been uploading thousands of bytes of data to the Web, yet I have not uploaded anything or sent any emails. I'm worried that some kind of virus is sending my personal data to someone online even though I have antivirus software installed on my PC.

Odette Colyer

A You probably have nothing to worry about if you have antivirus software with up-to-date virus definitions. What you are seeing is normal behaviour when you download files from the Net. When files are sent over the Net they are split into chunks called packets. When you receive a packet of information, your PC sends a message back to the Internet effectively saying 'I've received that packet okay, send the next one.' The more data you download, the more messages your PC sends back over the link. If you are worried about anyone hacking into your system, get some protection software such as Norton Internet Security or Personal Firewall. See **www.symantec.com**.



Make your PC or Apple Mac more secure with Norton Personal Firewall from Symantec

Site b

META FUSION

Q Is it possible to insert Meta tags into pages with NetObjects Fusion 2?

Peter Fitzgerald

A It's possible to add Meta tags to pages using any Web editing package that will allow you to manually enter HTML code – which is almost all of them. You can find out how to do this with the package you mention by visiting **www.netobjects.com** and typing 'Meta' into the search box on the front page. This will list a range of support documents, including one for Fusion 2. It actually relies on the user manually entering the code, which isn't particularly helpful. Worse still, the documentation provides a means by which the same Meta tags can be automatically added to each and

every page of a site. This should be avoided at all costs, because if a page has a Meta tag it should be customised and unique to the contents of that page. That said, it's not vital to spend hours adding keywords to each and every page on your site – only the main section pages really need to be given Meta tags (ie suitable points of entry to the site for visitors from search engines). You can find a useful online generator of Meta tags at

uilding Q&A

JAMES SEABRIGHT ANSWERS SITE BUILDING QUERIES. EMAIL HIM AT JAMES@PARAGON.CO.UK

www.eons.com/metabuilder.htm. This also comes with full support for the whole range of Meta options including automatic page refresh as well as the site description and keyword elements commonly referred to by search engines.

COMMERCE CONFUSION

Q I am currently in the process of finding out how to set up a site in order to sell online. Having details from two sources about the best process to follow, I have been advised to look into taking some sort of insurance against customers buying with cards etc who then turn out to be unable to support payment.

Bill Hardy

A The standard practice adopted by most sites is to only send goods when payment has been confirmed. Once a transaction has been authorised by the card issuer, the only reason why payment might not be forthcoming is if you have failed to follow the regulations set down by your merchant account. Card authorisation can happen very swiftly with most credit card clearing methods, whether you are manually entering card details into an existing terminal or passing on card transactions to a third party handler such as Worldpay (**www.worldpay.com**). In fact, that company offers a premium level of service to customers who are particularly concerned about combating fraud and providing a higher level of guarantee against fraud than offered as standard. A different kind of service, which provides a more complete insurance package for both vendor and purchaser, is available from **www.technosure.com**. It offers a cost-effective solution that will reassure customers that they've got nothing to lose through buying from you.

SILVER SURFER

Q Having recently retired I have been delving into some of the things my PC can do – so I have a few questions about getting started with my own Web site. What exactly are Web hosting and forwarding services, and do I need to have one? Do I need to register a domain name? Since my site contains a commercial element am I restricted to certain types of ISPs? If you can help, I would be extremely grateful.

Brian D'Silva

A Web hosting is an essential feature of any site, as it is the service that makes your Web pages accessible to other Net users by storing them servers, which are powerful computers with a permanent connection to the Internet. Free hosting services are widely available – **www.geocities.com** and **www.homestead.com** are two of the most popular. These are generally funded through advertising, whereas many Internet service providers (ISPs) provide ad-free Web space to their users. We've not come across any ISPs who restrict this to non-commercial uses, but you should really check the user agreement before putting anything online.

Web forwarding is a service offered mainly by domain registration companies, who will register and host a domain (eg brian-dsilva.com) on your behalf and then forward any Web visitors to an address of your choice. This means that people who type www.brian-dsilva.com into their browser will be forwarded to your free Web space, which might be something like www.geocities.com/Hollywood/1345/brian-dsilva.

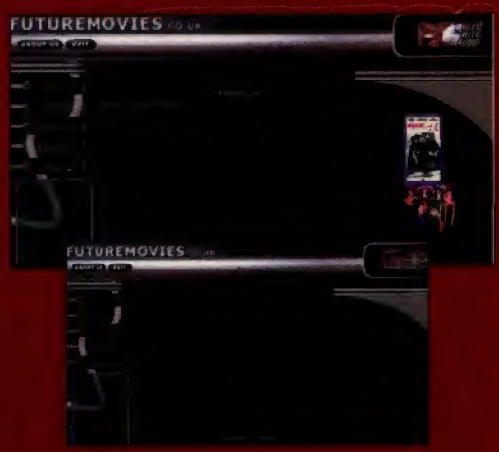
It's not important to register a domain name for a personal home page, but as you're working on a commercial site then it makes more sense to get one, not least because it can help you to get listed by search engines, bringing more customers to the site. A range of domain registrars can be found in the advertisements in the back of this magazine.

DESIGN DOCTOR

FUTURE MOVIES

WWW.FUTUREMOVIES.CO.UK

JOHAN DE SILVA has contacted the Design Doctor with a plea for help about his latest site, Future Movies. Its purpose is to review and recommend existing cinema and video/DVD releases in addition to showcasing the work of moviemakers trying to get their big break in the film business. However, he's had problems getting listings on search engines, and has been told by Yahoo! that the site is not Netscape compatible. As ever, the Doctor is ready with a few prescriptions...



FRAMESET FRUSTRATION

Yahoo! was correct to point out that the site doesn't work with Netscape. The problem lies in the rather unconventional frame code, which could really do with being recreated from scratch. Whilst doing that, Johan should also add links to the main sections of the site from within the NOFRAMES tag. This will allow search engines and users of old browsers to access the site.

A LINK OR NOT A LINK?

For some reason, all the links on the site appear in the same colour and font size as the normal text on the site. The only distinguishing element is that links are bold, although that's easily mistaken for just bold text. This needs to be addressed so that visitors can find their way around the site a little easier – even if it just means adding underlining to the existing style.

TOO BIG AND TOO SMALL

The contents of the site are sometimes just too big – often the page width is such that horizontal scrolling is necessary to get the whole picture. It's best to steer clear of such wide pages, or alternatively to not create pages of a fixed width in the first place. In another way, the site contents are too small – there just aren't very many pages at the moment.

Need a new Internet Service Provider?

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- Active Discussion Group to ask and answer I.S.P questions
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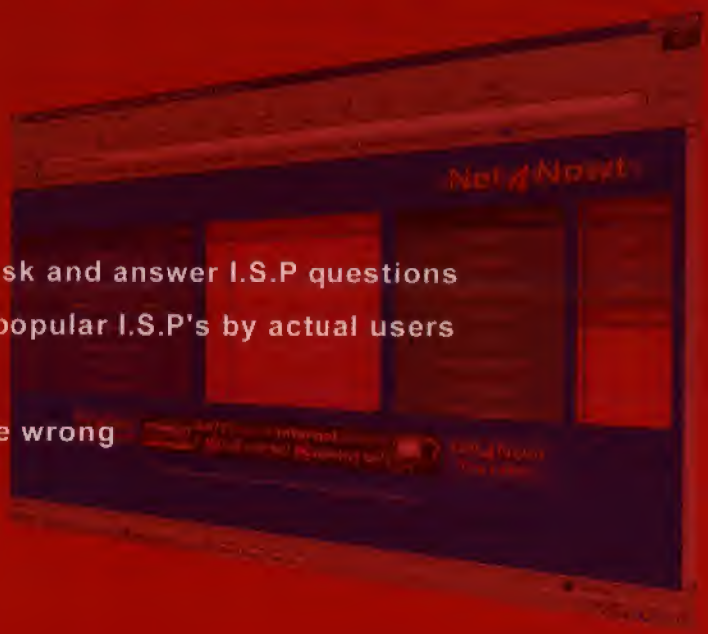

www.net4nowt.com
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Net4Nowt

Net4nowt Internet Phone

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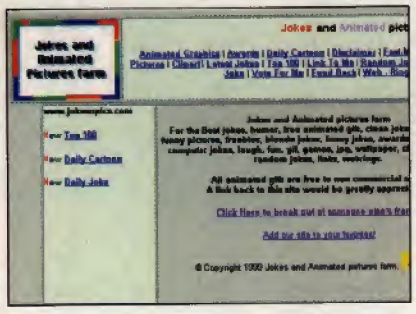
Site building Q&A

REVVING UP SEARCH ENGINES

Q I try to keep my site www.jokesnpics.com nice and tidy by keeping pages in their respective folders, unfortunately some of the search engine spiders only see about 80 pages. Do you have any idea on how I can improve on this please?

Pamela Pamphilon

A There's no reason to suspect that search engines will not index a page on your site just because it is stored in a sub-directory. Also, there's not really any cause for concern that engines have 'only' indexed 80 pages on your site – that's actually a very large number. You should concentrate on ensuring that the pages which are getting listed feature relevant keywords, both in their Meta tags and within the body of the page itself. This will enhance your chances of getting those pages ranked highly in results pages. You can find further advice on improving your search engine rankings at www.selfpromotion.com.



FROM RUSSIA WITH WEB

Q I have recently published a Web site at http://freespace.virgin.net/www.vpasquale. I've used Submit Express to apply to a number of search engines and found that none of them have added my site. Is it because it is a free Web address?

Liberato Pasquale

A It's unlikely that search engines will have discriminated against your site because it is based on a free space server. The more likely explanation is that your site has not been listed because its Web address is a sub-directory of another server. If search engines have registered a large number of other sites based on the same domain, it's possible that they won't add any more to their database. You'd be well advised to get a domain name for your site, which would improve your listing chances. This doesn't have to cost you anything – visit www.namezero.com or www.ndo.co.uk to find out more about getting hold of a free domain name. However, as your Web site is advertising a business, it is best to avoid hosting other businesses' adverts on your site. If it means that you have to pay for a domain and/or Web hosting to avoid your page showing an advert, it is definitely a worthwhile investment that will make your company look more professional.

POP-UP WINDOWS

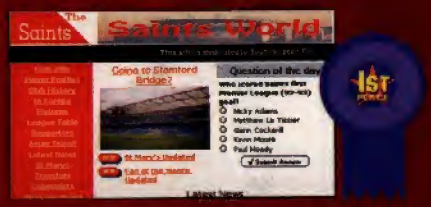
Q I'm building a Web site and want my links, when clicked, to appear in a separate window. This way I've got more chance of keeping people in my site and them not getting lost! How do I do this?

Tony Ward

A I'm not sure that pop up windows are a sure-fire way of stopping users from getting lost – they may well be disoriented by the sudden appearance of a new browser window. Anyway, here's the code you'd use to make a link appear in a new window: Click here. You can also add the code <base target="_blank"> to the <head> section of your page to make all links generate new pop-up windows. By changing this to <base target="window2"> then all links will go to the same new window. This is also used for dealing with links between frames, which may well be a better way to organise your site than to link into pop up windows.

READERS' SITES

MAKE YOUR SITE IMMORTAL – SEND THE URL TO JAMES@PARAGON.CO.UK



Saints World

Site creator: Mark White
URL: www.saintsworld

Comment: A very professional-looking site, which is a pleasure to look around even if you have no interest in Southampton Football Club. One particularly good idea is the A-Z index, making it simple for visitors to pinpoint the information they're looking for. It would be good to see a guestbook reflecting the overall site design, but that's a minor complaint.

Mel's Page

Site creator: Mel Nudd
URL: www.btinternet.com/mels.page

Comment: Mel's page appeared many issues ago, and is being featured again because of the great redesign. The new site has a bright, attractive feel to it. There's lots of interesting content, with good use of photos. The only slight quibble is that there hasn't been much new material added recently.

Just For Kids Who Love Books

Site creator: Alan Brown
URL: www.alanbrown.com

Comment: This site has hundreds of reviews and links relating to children's fiction. It's an impeccable resource, let down by a design that doesn't make it clear when a link is for an external site. It will also become unwieldy when the range of authors extends further.

HOW WE BUILT BlackStar

BlackStar has come a long way since it was started by three friends in Belfast three years ago. **Thomas Watson** speaks to one of those three, Darryl Collins

Darryl Collins has seen BlackStar go up and up in the eCommerce world

Some of the more popular programmes and films are given their very own sections in BlackStar

So many successful eCommerce projects these days start up with the same weary formula – a bit of market research, loads of 'brainstorming', then inviting top Web design agencies to pitch in for the potentially lucrative contract. BlackStar, now proudly celebrating its third birthday, was born in slightly different circumstances.

When Darryl Collins and two of his friends first considered the idea of setting up their video and DVD site in 1997, they looked around for relevant design companies to generate the right look and feel. "We were in Belfast, though," he explains. "And it was hardly a hi-tech mecca, so we did it ourselves." Even the homegrown creation of the site managed to follow a different path as well. Instead of the common months of deliberation and 'conceptualising', the team of three were spurred into action when one of the partners came in to the office one Monday, and announced that he wanted to create the site in seven days.

Now a company that ships some 150,000 items a month and has a staff of over 90, the beginnings of BlackStar were infinitely more humble. Taking a look at the initial investors shows you the scope available to the team. Collins' brother, a driller in Dubai invested, as did the company's landlords. Also, the man from Del Monte – he say yes, as the team picked up capital from the parent company of the drinks manufacturer.

The team's non-Internet background, which could have been a hindrance, actually benefited the initial growth of the site. This was three friends with a passion for films, who had seen the success of Amazon, and thought: "it's happening there – it could happen here". One took care of the business side, as well as developing the now huge database, one did the programming, while the other dealt with the site design.

Smashing misconceptions

One of the main plus points of entering the vast eCommerce arena from scratch, admits Darryl Collins, is that, "to some extent, our ignorance helped us. We challenged preconceptions about business". In particular, Collins points to the 'orthodoxies' that creep up on growing eCommerce companies. These supposed rules of thumb should be taken with a pinch of salt, according to him. "You must have a dot com. Bollocks. You must be called the same thing in each country. Bollocks. You must sign a deal with a high profile portal. Bollocks."

Luckily, the three founding members of BlackStar had more than enough Internet knowledge to create the site. "I had an Internet account two years before any of my friends," boasts Collins. Although they had little experience of professional Web design, the 'techie' know-how amassed by these three allowed them to implement quite advanced features on the site from the very start.

"WE ONLY WANT TO BE THE 'BUY' BUTTON AT THE BOTTOM OF A SITE"

The advanced level of the site immediately incorporated a liberal use of Perl. Not for the faint of heart by any means, this developers' language has proved essential for the commerce facilities on the site. In fact, BlackStar uses Perl to such an extent that the site became a regular topic of conversation on the Perl discussion forums. "We get help from Perl programmers from all over the place," states Darryl Collins. "People even offer to come and work for us for nothing." And, just in case you doubted the rock solid marriage-like relationship between BlackStar and Perl, Collins proudly tells of how his

THE SITE

The site	
BlackStar	www.blackstar.co.uk
Who designed it?	
In-house	
Number of people involved?	
Originally, only three	
Software used?	
Database is Perl-driven	
Number of pages?	
Approx 50,000	
Number of customers?	
250,000	
Number of items shipped?	
On average 5,000 a day	

TIME SCALE

1997 – The three founders of BlackStar start working on their nascent idea

March 1998 – BlackStar begins trading

December 2000 – BlackStar has grown some 350% in the last year

March 2001 – In a time of dying dot coms, BlackStar celebrates its third birthday

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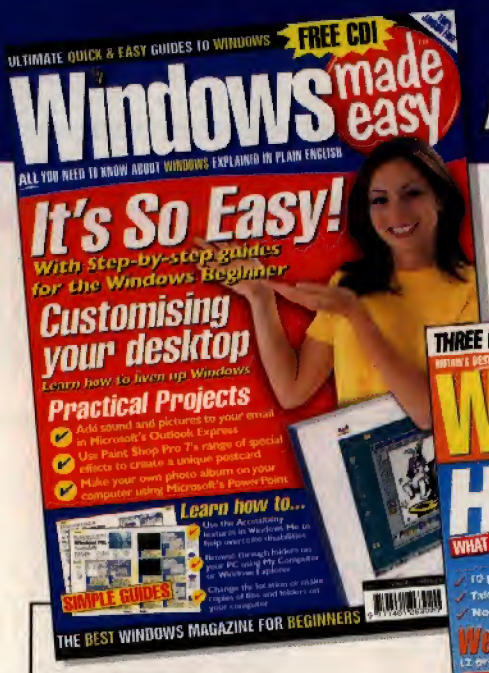

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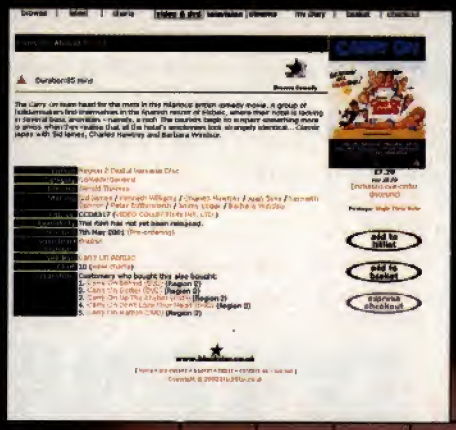

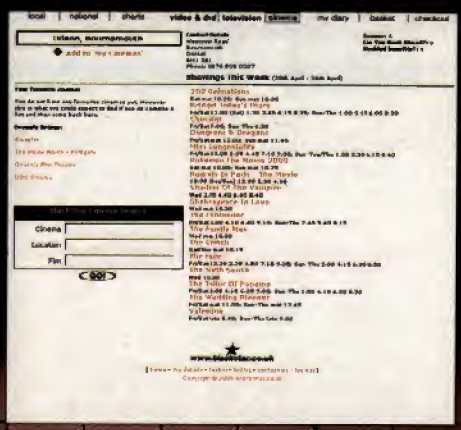

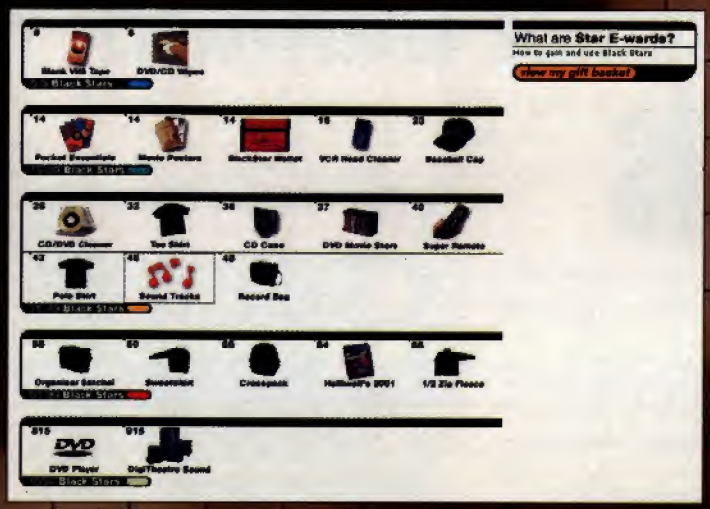

The huge database allows BlackStar to include special sections on various themes

company is sponsoring one of the developers of the language for a year to take a sabbatical from his lecturing job and concentrate on improving it further. BlackStar pays half his wages for a year, in return for long term developments in the language that powers its site.

As you might imagine, the vast majority of the site is database driven, meaning that there are very few static pages. This leads Darryl Collins to estimate that there are something in the region of 50,000 pages on the site. After all, every time a visitor initiates a search, a page is generated. More than anything, though, it means that there are never deadlines for updates to the site. Because new videos and DVDs are constantly being released, updates are made to the database as and when they're needed.

As if to support Collins' assertions that BlackStar is a small company made big, he steadfastly refuses to divulge the size of the team now responsible for maintaining the site. "We see the company operating as one organic whole," he claims. "Everybody maintains the database in some way, from dedicated programmers to workers who sometimes have to scan covers in the warehouse when a batch of DVDs come in."

Technology issues

An unusual trait of BlackStar is that it has always had to blaze a technology trail on its own. "We had to learn lots of trades when we started," admits Collins. "There were no great e-consultants in Belfast in 1997". Even back then, the launch team had to hunt around for relevant services, many of which were seen as outlandish at the time. "At the absolute start of BlackStar, we used an ISP for our Web space. Within six months though, we had our own bandwidth. Sure, there are lots of places now that offer server hosting, but there wasn't when we started." Nowadays, the bandwidth comes from four different suppliers.

Even the much-trumpeted database is actually based around four separate ones. Darryl Collins is quick to point out that, although they've grown, BlackStar is often superior these databases with regards to information. "We weren't getting the extra DVD tracks and options relayed to us from one of our databases, so we had to do it on our own."

For BlackStar, even electricity has been carefully considered and planned. "In the early days, if you tipped over a cable, everything went down. We now get our electricity from two different suppliers, and we have our own generator as well." A tad excessive, you might think? Not really. "The whole street went down for two days recently – we didn't even blink. If we're down for even an hour, we've lost an awful lot of money."

A competitive edge

When talking to Darryl Collins, the subject of BlackStar's most famous rival inevitably crops up. He maintains, though, that "we do a lot of things that Amazon haven't thought of doing. There's a subtlety to our layout that is lost on some people." He admits that many visitors are baffled as to why BlackStar does not feature reviews. Quite simply: "we are looking for objective content. We don't want to compete with review magazines. We only want to be the 'buy' button at the bottom of a site". With this in mind, BlackStar has managed to amass a staggering 3,500 partner sites.

"Another orthodoxy is that your site has to be 'sticky'." Collins states, though: "we're retailers, and want to streamline the whole buying process. We wanted to make the process as fast and slick as possible". That's why there are no fancy dan Flash elements on the site.

Collins does admit that the site "is due a makeover". Currently on version four, the team want to introduce new elements, "but not just a new design for the sake of it. After all, you might put people off." The site has progressed through its various incarnations, though. "It's moved from being a BMW of the 1970's to a current model with all the bells and whistles." ■

hardware on test

BEFORE YOU BUY ANY EXTRAS FOR YOUR PC, READ THE BEST HARDWARE REVIEW SECTION FOR EXPERT ADVICE ON WHAT TO BUY

Hardware

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You no longer have to be shackled to a desk in order to get work done. Notebook computers let you work wherever you are, and PCMCIA modem cards mean you can access the Net on the move. We test five of the best

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The first ball-less, cordless mouse shapes up pretty well

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A quality headset that combines looks, features and quality

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PASSWORD MANAGERS.....138
As you spend more time online, you'll find that you accumulate more and more usernames and passwords. The problem is, all of these passwords and names can be difficult to remember. That's where password managers come in. With one of these, you can store all of your passwords in a safe place, and some even let you drag and drop the relevant password directly onto a site

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CGI & PERL IN EASY STEPS.....143
Get to grips with Perl scripting and learn to master its functions

CLICKS, BRICKS AND BRANDS.....143
'Clicks and mortar' companies go under the microscope in this interactive book

Practical internet BEST BUY ★★★★★

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FIVE PCMCIA CARDS ON TEST

PCMCIA modem cards

Martin Pipe assesses five PCMCIA modems, for portable computers

PCMCIA cards are miniature peripherals that plug into slots usually located on the side of notebook computers. There are several types of PCMCIA peripherals available. Modems apart, we have memory cards, GSM (cellular) data cards, network controllers and hard disk drives. All PCMCIA (or 'PC') cards derive their power from the notebook, eliminating the need for extra batteries or mains adaptors. PCMCIA cards come in three 'sizes'. Most machines will accommodate two of the thinner (Type 1 and 2) cards, or one of the fatter (Type 3) cards. Type 3 cards tend to be restricted to mobile hard disk drives – modems, on the other hand, are usually of the Type 2 form factor. Indeed, four of the devices tested fall into this camp. The remaining Xircom one isn't a conventional PCMCIA modem.

ONLINE RESOURCES

www.teleadapt.com
Get your phone adaptors here

PCMCIA web site
www.pcmcia.org

www.downloadaccelerator.com
The home of Download Accelerator - a must for any Internet user!

Modem Central
www.56k.com

www.itu.org
ITU Web site

Instead, it has the same tiny form factor as a CompactFlash memory card. CompactFlash is based on the PCMCIA standard - indeed, you can buy adaptors that will allow these devices to be plugged into standard PCMCIA ports. The Xircom modem is intended for Windows CE-type PDAs, which simply don't have the space for a regular PCMCIA slot.

Contact: Xircom
URL: www.xircom.co.uk
Phone: 01256 332552
Price: £120

1. CompactCard Modem 56 Global Access

THE COMPACTCARD HAS the same form factor – and appearance – of the CompactFlash cards that some digital cameras rely on. Xircom has managed to cram the essential components of a V.90 modem into this tiny space, which is something of an engineering miracle. Mind you, the circuitry associated with the telephone line is mounted inside an intermediate 'dongle'. You also get a series of phone adaptors for the Dutch, Belgian and UK telephone systems.

Tiny world

The mini-PCMCIA card is, appropriately enough, designed for use with miniature computers. It's compatible with Windows 2.0 CE palmtop computers that have a Type II Compact Flash slot – one that's slightly taller than a standard memory card, in other words. Computers in question include models from Casio, H-P and Compaq. Note, though, that Psion's range of EPOC PDAs are incompatible – its CompactFlash sockets are only intended for memory cards. However, the CompactCard will work with regular Windows notebooks if the appropriate PCMCIA adaptor is used. Our compressed test file downloaded at 49800bps, while our uncompressed one transferred at a rate of 97700bps. Note that the CompactCard is not flash-upgradable.

THE VERDICT	
Features	★★★★☆
Ease of use	★★★★★
Value	★★★★☆
Overall	★★★★☆

Practical internet
BEST BUY ★★★★★

Contact: Elsa GB Ltd
URL: www.elsa.co.uk
Phone: 01189 657755
Price: £60

2. Elsa Microlink 56k MC Internet

THE MC INTERNET is a conventional V.90 PCMCIA modem, intended for use with regular notebook PCs. As with most of the tested products, the Zoom Dual Mode is a Type 2 card, so will occupy half the typical PCMCIA docking bay. The other slot can be taken up by another peripheral, such as a network or memory card. One end of the line cable attaches to the card, while the other end terminates in an American-style RJ-45 plug. The latter mates with a country-specific telephone adaptor, which is inserted into a convenient wall socket.

Telephone business

The MC Internet is supplied with two rather weird-looking telephone adaptors, in addition to a standard UK one. You also get a telephone extension cord and adaptor. A nice touch, because Sods' Law dictates that the telephone socket won't be located anywhere convenient! The supported operating systems are Windows 95, 98, 2000 or NT4. You also get Communicate Lite, Elsa's own communications suite for Windows. The 56k MC Internet installed onto our Toshiba Pentium II notebook without a hitch. In use, connection is reliable, and data transfer rates are good. Our compressed test file, which is representative of program downloads and MP3 files, zipped along quite nicely at an average of 47300bps. Our uncompressed file, which is representative of HTML and text documents, had an average transfer rate of over 96000bps.

THE VERDICT	
Features	★★★★☆
Ease of use	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

Contact: TDK
URL: www.tdksys.com
Phone: 0208 938 1000
Price: £105

3. TDK ProDigital

TDK ACKNOWLEDGES THAT two slots are seldom ever enough, and has designed PCMCIA cards that combine several functions within the same body. Its flash-upgradable ProDigital, a standard Type II card, falls into this category. It hasn't got an analogue modem, but you do get network and – with an optional cable – ISDN terminal adaptor capabilities. With another optional cable, GSM data is also possible. Transfers here are restricted to a paltry 9600bps, which pales into insignificance when compared to today's cable modems. GPRS (an enhancement of GSM) and 3G will improve matters, but GSM data will fill the gap until these new services become universally-available.

Wireless Web

The 9600bps speed is fine for basic (i.e. email and fax, although Web pages are painfully slow. Still, connecting to the Internet without any wires is quite an impressive concept. A major drawback is the ridiculous cost of the optional cellular data and ISDN cables – £95 seems a lot to pay for what is a basically a piece of cable with a modem plug at one end and a GSM handset or ISDN plug on the other. The only cable supplied hooks the card to your network via a RJ-45 adaptor; note that both 10Mb/s and 100Mb/s Ethernet standards are supported. Installation under Windows '98 (95, ME, 2000 and NT4 are also supported) was a breeze. Our uncompressed test file was downloaded at 18000bps, while the compressed one made it across at 9300bps. Still, it's the portability that counts!

THE VERDICT	
Features	★★★★☆
Ease of use	★★★★☆
Value	★★★★☆
Overall	★★★★☆

Contact: US Robotics
URL: www.usr-emea.com
Phone: 08000 289362
Price: £130

4. US Robotics Megahertz 56k

LIKE THE AVERAGE PCMCIA modem, the firmware-upgradable Megahertz is a Type II card. It shares a similarity with the TDK model because it will work with some GSM phones for cellular data. As supplied, though, it's a regular V.90 modem, suitable for notebooks running Windows 95, 98, NT4 and 2000. Elementary support for Linux and PCMCIA-equipped Powerbooks, in the form of scripts, is provided on the US Robotics Web site. An unusual design feature is the X-Jack line socket, which will accept the supplied cable's RJ-45 plug directly. A clear plastic panel on the side of the card is pressed, and a spring-loaded panel is released. The plug is inserted into this sideways. Another neat feature of the X-Jack line socket is that it illuminates when the modem is active. Unfortunately, that sideways plug may well clash with the connectors of your second PCMCIA card, should you have one in your machine.

Data capabilities

As regards the card's GSM data capabilities, you have two options. The first is to buy an expensive cable that's specific to your Nokia or Ericsson phone, but they are expensive. The other option, provided through the supplied GSM Connection program, is to use the IrDA infrared capabilities of modem notebooks and some recent handsets. As a V.90 modem, we were able to achieve fair transfer rates of 49400bps and 98300bps with our compressed and uncompressed test files respectively.

THE VERDICT	
Features	★★★★☆
Ease of use	★★★☆☆
Value	★★★★☆
Overall	★★★★☆

Contact: Portable Add-ons
URL: www.portable.co.uk
Phone: 01256 396555
Price: £210

5. Netmobile Fast EM503G

ANOTHER PCMCIA TYPE II card, the Netmobile Fast is a multifunction device. In this respect, it's similar to the TDK ProDigital. Unlike the TDK product, it's best suited to notebook PCs that don't have an internal analogue modem – your money buys you an Ethernet card capable of working at 10Mbps or 100Mbps, together with a V.90 modem. Like the TDK, it can be upgraded to support GSM data and ISDN.

Status LEDs

The card's line interface is built into a 'dongle' that incorporates two LEDs. One indicates when the modem is connected, while the second is active when data is being sent or received. Status LEDs are also fitted to the Ethernet adaptor, which can be fitted to a second port on the card. As far as we are concerned, these are the only good points. No documentation of any kind is supplied – not even a basic set up guide. What's more, installing the program onto our Toshiba notebook gave us problems, and the lack of documentation was frustrating. Even if you were to get Windows to successfully recognise the device, another program then has to be run to install the modem! Eventually, the program threw up a 'modem not found' message on our Toshiba's monitor. After several hours of hair-pulling, we gave up with this poorly thought-out product. A technical support technician suggested that our sample could be faulty. Let's hope so...

THE VERDICT	
Features	★★★★☆
Ease of use	★☆☆☆☆
Value	★★☆☆☆
Overall	★★☆☆☆

JARGON BUSTER

Bit
A single binary digit

bps
Bits Per Second – a measure of data speed

ITU
International Telecommunications Union. Ratifies modem standards

Modem
MOdulator/DEModulator. Interface device between a computer and telephone line

PCMCIA
Personal Computer Memory Card Association. The standards body responsible for the 'credit-card' peripherals notebook users now take for granted

V.90
The international 56Kbps modem standard, set by the ITU on 6 Feb 1998

QUICK TESTS

Logitech Cordless MouseMan Optical

Practical internet BEST BUY ★★★★★

The first ball-less, cordless mouse is set to cause quite a stir

Contact: Logitech
URL: www.logitech.com
Phone: 020 7309 0127
Price: £54.99

AS THE WORLD of mouse technology develops at rapid rates, we've seen mice with their balls taken out for cleaner and more efficient operation. There's also been cordless mice, alleviating the tangled mess that many of us find ourselves in. Now Logitech has married these two technologies together.

This is a mouse which uses both optical and cordless technology, making for a smoother, more refined cursory experience. The Cordless MouseMan Optical houses two AA batteries for operation, making it slightly more cumbersome than normal, although no more wieldy. Unfortunately, the stresses of running the mouse without cables means even Logitech admits that the batteries will only last around two months.

In the range

The mouse has a range of two metres, which is more than enough. In practice, it works just like any other mouse. You move the cursor and press the buttons, although everything works a bit more smoothly than usual.

There's a handy 'thumb button' resting on the underside of the mouse, which you can configure to perform a range of functions.

Okay, it costs £55, which is still a lot of money for a mouse, but this is the best mouse we've seen, and is the most advanced you can buy at the moment.

THE VERDICT

Features	★★★★★
Ease of use	★★★★★
Value	★★★★☆
Overall	★★★★★

Labtec Axis-002

For once, a headset that manages to combine looks, features and quality

Contact: Labtec
URL: www.labtec.com
Phone: 01256 386000
Price: £29.99

IF YOU TOOK a peak at our Yahoo! tutorial on page 64-65, you'll understand the importance of having a microphone attached to your PC. Most new computers will already come with a mic bundled amongst the cacophony of hardware, but the quality of such a device is normally along the lines of a 1910s gramaphone. And why should you put up with poor quality, when you can get your hands on much more impressive goods for not very much money.

The Axis-002 from Labtec is the first headset we've seen to incorporate the trendy 'switchback' style, so those of you of a tonsorial bent needn't worry about their neat coiffure being spoiled. As you'd expect of Labtec, the standard of sound encased within the headphones is extremely high, and the even mix of bass and treble combine for balanced listening.

Taking the mic

The microphone attached to the Axis-002 produces a stunningly meaty sound, even from the most quiet and austere of tones. Considering most people are content with tacky cheap microphones, this is a surefire way to stand out from the crowd, and sound the loudest in any voice chat room you venture into. It also enables you to use your microphone for more than the most perfunctory of purposes, and turns it into a piece of kit worth having.

What's more, the uses for PC headsets are increasing all the time. With voice recognition getting better, and Internet Telephony now proving more of a reality than a strange concept, the chances are that your PC will thank you for plugging a decent mic into it eventually.

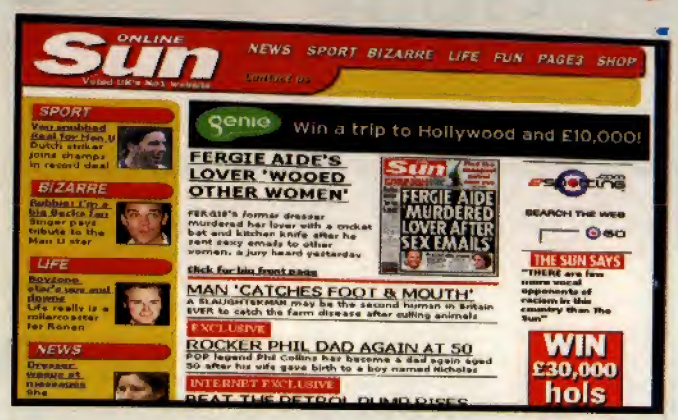
As far as technical specifications go, the Axis-002 comes with an always handy 8' cable, enabling you to walk around the room with ease whilst booming your voice to all and sundry. It also comes adorned with gold-plated plugs, for that little added extra in sound quality.

THE VERDICT

Features	★★★★☆
Ease of use	★★★★☆
Value	★★★★☆
Overall	★★★★☆

Alternative ways

You don't need a PC to access the Web – Thomas Watson takes a look at six of the options open to you



During it's infancy, there was one way, and one way only to get on the Net – buy a PC. As it quickly became more popular than the proverbial sliced bread, sales of PCs soared like no-one's business. Suddenly, everyone from the gaming, Limp Bizkit-obsessed youth to the local bird-watching vicar was seen rushing to their high street store to join the supposed Internet revolution.

Technology being what it is, limiting the immense power of the Internet to one piece of static equipment was never going to last long. So, once it was taken for granted that every new PC would have Internet access, manufacturers started making all manner of products Net-compatible.

The shift from the PC has been instigated mainly to get people away from their desks. It doesn't matter how you jazz up a PC with shiny colours and cool design, you're still asking people to sit at a boring desk for hours on end. And, considering most of us endure the monotony of doing that in an office five days a week, it quickly becomes tedious.

Because of this, more and more of your portable or everyday objects have Internet accessibility. What's more, a dedicated Net box for your telly costs significantly less than a PC, mainly because it doesn't need the streams of hardware you'll find in your everyday home computer. So, shying away from the PC towards less arcane methods of connection allows punters to not only save money, but prevents them clogging up their much needed living space with desks full of CPUs, hard drives, monitors and so on.

At the moment, developments in Net connectivity are mainly concerned with phones, TVs, and traditionally gear. But the future might see the Net being integrated into some altogether more unusual appliances.

to access the Net

Amstrad e-mailer

Alan Sugar's entry level communicator does the job for eighty quid

Product: Amstrad e-mailer
Price: £80
URL: www.amstrad.com

DESPITE BEING ONE of the cheapest pieces of kit in this round-up, the Amstrad e-mailer still manages to boast the most most exciting design. In fact, we think this is just how HG Wells envisaged communication in the 21st Century in his futuristic novels. Because it looks like a standard phone with a screen tacked on the top, you can't help but feel that the designers at Amstrad are trying to tap into the lucrative retro market.

Although the screen is well-lit and easy to read, some of you might be annoyed to hear that it doesn't offer a full colour display. The display is tinted, though, so at least you're not forced to stare at boring black and white all day.

As the name implies, this device is only for emailing – so don't expect any Web browsing action. Aimed at the beginner end of the market, it's ideal for punters who want a shot of emailing their friends and family without spending hundreds of pounds on a PC.

With the family unit in mind, you can specify up to eight different password-controlled users on the e-mailer. There's also a rather spanking 700 name address book, which should satisfy even the most popular of emailers.

Bush Internet TV

The Net-ready television finally comes of age

Product: Bush Internet TV
Price: £499
URL: www.bushinternet.com

INTERNET-ENABLED TELEVISIONS have been around for a year now, turning technophobes up and down the country into seasoned browsers. The only slight problem with these hybrids was that you were limited to comparatively tiny 14-inch screen.

Bush has redressed the balance, though, and the world of widescreen has caught up with the Net. Part of its latest range, the 28" widescreen model allows viewers to browse the Net without squinting at the screen.

Apart from being cheaper than most PCs, the Internet TV promises to be incredibly easy to set up and use. There are but three steps to Internet heaven: plug the TV into your phone socket, press the yellow Internet button on the remote control, and choose World Wide Web. Easy.

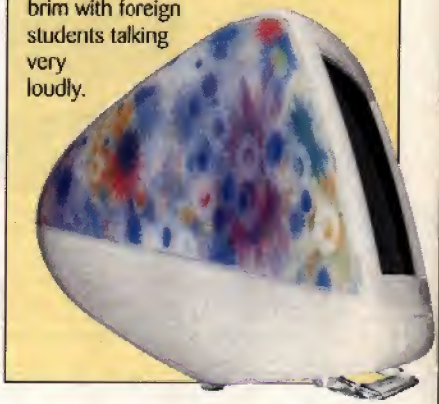
The TV comes with a remote control, which flips open to reveal a small-scale QWERTY keyboard. This makes for one of the biggest remote controls you'll ever see, and doesn't exactly bowl you over with its beauty. You can purchase an infra-red keyboard separately for £30, though.

OTHER WAYS TO GET ONLINE

AT THE MOMENT, there are a whole myriad of methods to have you browsing without touching that familiar Windows interface. Since it was rejigged and made beautiful, the Mac has seen an upturn in fortunes. Okay, so you're still using a computer, but the 'i' in iMac does stand for Internet, and you're talking a whole different operating system to get to grips with. So, it is fundamentally accessing the Net without a PC, honest.

Launched amid much hype, the Dreamcast has proved something of a damp squib in the console market, and is now on its way out. It's still the only games machine at the moment that will connect you to the Net, though, and with prices coming down all the time, might prove to be the cheapest option of all pretty soon.

Recently, though, you haven't even needed any equipment of your own. Developing the idea first started with the cybercafé, BT has introduced an emailing function in many of its phone boxes up and down the country. Not only are there many more of these kicking about than there ever were cybercafés, you'll probably find that your local call box isn't filled to the brim with foreign students talking very loudly.



ex:trakt chair

The dentist's chair is no longer an object of misery, thanks to this expensive piece of fun

Product: ex:trakt dentist's chair
Price: starts at £2,500
URL: www.extrakt.co.uk

OKAY, SO WE'RE bending the rules ever so slightly with this one, as you do need a PC to make any use of this crazy contraption. But it's such a bizarre idea that we simply couldn't pass up the opportunity to tell you all about it.

Created, oddly enough, by a graphic designer and a hairdresser, this is the utmost in browsing chic. If you've ever cursed having to sit hunched over your computer desk for hours on end, causing untold damage to your weary body, then the exquisitely expensive ex:trakt chair will be right up your alley.

Based on the idea of combining the comfort of a dentist's chair with the need to work on a computer, the ex:trakt chair will provide years of pleasure for its owner – and years of mirth for its owner's friends.

Each chair is specially designed to the user's needs, with expert advice available from the team on such matters as upholstery and which sound system to choose. Not only that, but the arm of the ex:trakt chair can be designed to house any gadget you like. So, anything you feel you'd need close to your right hand at all times can be held there.

Siemens SL45

WAP phones are now sleek and stylish, and contain all kinds of built-in extras

Product: Siemens SL45
Price: £230-£250
URL: www.siemens.co.uk

WAY BACK WHEN, the only way to fit WAP capabilities on a mobile phone was to revert back to the old 'brick' style, where the mobility of the phone was outweighed by its massive bulk. Sleekness is now top of the list, and this latest offering from Siemens is as cool as you like, with its shiny silver exterior and MP3 capabilities.

Weighing a minuscule 88g, the SL45 is actually the first mobile phone on the market to feature exchangeable memory cards. With 32Mb included as standard for your MP3 needs, the opportunity to oust this in favour of something more substantial shouldn't be sniffed at. You could also create 'albums' on each card, slotting each one in when the mood takes you. We like the fact that you can save your SMS messages to these removable memory cards as well.

The SL45 features a splendid seven line display, on what Siemens hyperbolically terms an 'extreme high contrast amber colour', which basically means that you'll be able to read what's on the screen.

What's particularly good about this phone is that it has everything you need – MP3, stylish looks, WAP, and much more. Whereas you've previously had to pay the same amount of money for just one of these features, you get the whole shebang here.

IS THE PC DEAD?

WITH ALL OF these new inventions offering Net access, are PCs surplus to requirements? Well we reckon there's a bit of life left in the old dog yet. The number of punters who splash out a grand just for Internet access without bothering about the other features of the PC are minimal. And the PC has so much more to offer than an Internet-ready television, for example. To start with, the PC is still the only way to store data you pick up online – dial up using a set-top box, and you lose everything you see as soon as you log off. So, unless you're more interested in fashion and fads, we suggest that the PC is still the numero uno choice for the Internet.

ONnet digital box

Got a big telly? Want to use it to browse the Web? Then ONnet is ideal for you

Product: ONnet digital box
Price: £5 a month
URL: www.ondigital.co.uk

THE ONNET SCHEME is unique amongst our rogues gallery of six, in that you don't pay for any hardware to receive Internet access. Instead, you subscribe to the ONdigital service, which itself nets you a free decoder, then fork out an extra fiver a month for connection to the Web.

For no initial outlay, you get a somewhat wittily nicknamed 'net top box', which measures up well – amounting to no more than the size of a paperback book. You'll also receive a full-size infra-red keyboard for easier sofa browsing. Remember, though, that browsing is going to cost you a fiver each month PLUS your call charges.

Setting up the box is an absolute doddle, and has been designed with even the most technically incompetent in mind – so you'll get an easy to follow manual designed to ease the process along.

As with the Bush TV, you can only use the equipment to access the Web, so added elements like sound and animation are completely out of your reach. Still, if you've got ONdigital already...

Palm m505

The latest PDAs will give you Net access, and a whole lot more

Product: Palm m505
Price: £399.99
URL: www.palm.com

THIS TINY PARCEL of joy is proudly said to be the lightest and smallest handheld colour computer on the market. Weighing a minuscule 128g, this really is the portable solution for anyone miffed by the tiny screen limitations of WAP.

Apart from its splendour and beauty, the m505 is among the latest breed of PDAs that offer full Internet capability. Connection can be achieved using a number of different means: you can connect wirelessly to a GSM phone using infra-red technology, or a cable. Alternatively, you can always connect the PDA to a Palm-compatible modem.

Considering the general limitations of the PDA, it's gratifying to learn that the m505, although ideal for email and SMS messaging, also offers a more specialised Internet service. In other words, you can access local Web content from around 450 sites, so at least you'll be guaranteed the latest news and info, as and when you need it.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME?

TALK HAS BEEN rife for some time now about the infiltration of the Net into every area of life. If you believe the futurists, your cooker will soon be imbued with magical connection qualities. Is this just pie in the sky?

Well, moves are already afoot to connect your household items with each other. Ubicom has recently introduced networked fridge/freezers and washing machines. At the moment, these appliances have communication chips and software to provide device management and networking. So, every appliance you own can now be controlled in one easy move. Even Internet-ready washing machines are no longer a pipe dream, though, for Ubicom promises such a feature in the near future.

And in Birmingham's lively Jewellery Quarter, new loft apartments have been erected with home networking technology built-in. Attempting to offer an 'enhanced lifestyle experience', each home has Digera connectivity system built into the walls. What this means, in plain English, is that homeowners can control the whole room, audio, television, TV, computer, and intruder system. Apparently, anyone who chooses the Internet and personal surveillance services combined can manage and monitor their home from anywhere in the world by using a simple Web browser.

software on test

WHERE WE TRY, TEST AND RATE ALL OF THE LATEST INTERNET SOFTWARE

Password managers

Don't wilt under a deluge of passwords, usernames and numbers. **Thomas Watson** tests five of the best password managers

The Web is big. Massive. There are more sites and pages than you could ever hope to visit, and more and more of them are asking for regular visitors to sign up to receive full service benefits.

So, pretty soon, you can find yourself with passwords for your email, several varieties of Webmail, news sites, sports sites, music sites, etc, etc. Add this to the fact that you need a password just to log on to the Internet in the first place, and you're looking at losing yourself in a puddle of passwords.

To make life easier, some people use the same password for everything they sign up for. But if some unscrupulous type finds out one of your passwords, they'll have access to every account you have.

This is why password managers are such a boon. The password chose for signing up for any site is stored in this program, along with your username. This is done in a variety of ways, but the best programs will let you password protect your passwords, so nosey family members can't get their hands on your accounts.

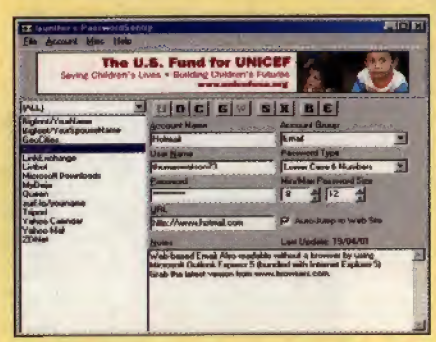
What's more, the better password managers have point and click options which mean that you can simply drag your password into the relevant box on whatever Web page you're visiting.

PASSWORD MANAGERS

1. Password Sentry

Product: Password Sentry
Company: Guntherware
Status: Freeware
URL: www.bigfoot.com/~guntherware

IF EVER THE term 'all-rounder' described something perfectly, then it is now. With its varied collection of features, Password Sentry is the Ian Botham of the password management world.

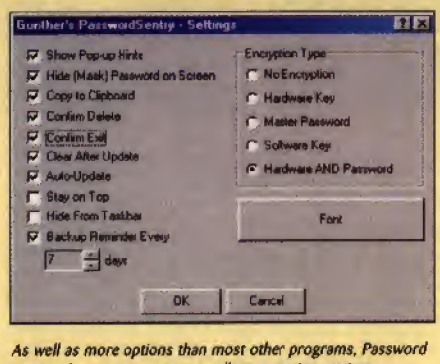


This simple and intuitive format marks Password Sentry down as one of the finer password managers we tested

The first thing that strikes you about Password Sentry is that a number of accounts have already been included in the software. This means you only have to alter the username and password, rather than having to create everything from scratch. The main Webmail suspects are there, including Yahoo! and Hotmail, as well as some big sites. Adding your own new account isn't as easy as we think it should be, though, especially as there is no 'new' button anywhere.

Options galore

Once you've entered your details, ticking on the 'auto-jump to site' box enables you to visit said site with a single click. In practice, this over-zealous feature soon proves more niggly than anything, as you can only tinker with your details by clicking on the account name, which opens up the Web site. There's supposed to be some kind of auto-copy feature for your password, which we found didn't work. It's back to good old manual copy and paste, then.



As well as more options than most other programs, Password Sentry also contains some excellent encrytion settings

As well as generating passwords for you, Password Sentry has a lovely range of options. You can define just how large or small each password is allowed to be by the site in question, and also which character format is used. By playing with these options, you can ensure that you are able to enter only the right kind of information in the relevant text box.

The most impressive here, though, is the staggering encryption techniques you can put to use. With five different methods to choose from, you can rest easy, safe in the knowledge that your usernames and passwords are for your eyes only.

THE VERDICT

What's good:
As many features as you'd ever need for no money

What's bad:
Has some idiosynchracies that might take a little while to get used to

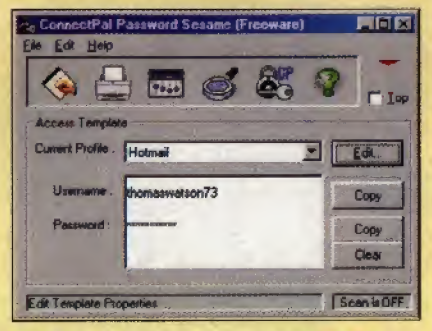
Overall ★★★★☆

2. Password Sesame

Product: Password Sesame
Company: ConnectPal
Status: Shareware
URL: www.connect-pal.com

FOR THOSE OF you who want a degree of automation to their password management, Password Sesame is ideal. Featuring a snazzy scan facility, this program will show a window reminding you of your username and password when you reach the appropriate site.

On first opening, Password Sesame might just scare the living daylights out of the uninitiated. Instead of 'sites', 'accounts' etc, you're confronted with 'Access templates' and 'Current profiles'. It's unnecessary and needlessly confusing.

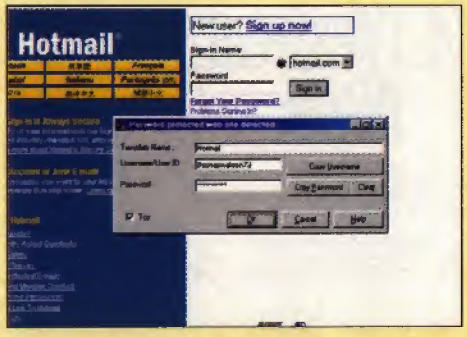


With liberal use of phrases like 'Access Template', the Password Sesame interface could scare you off at first. It's easy, though. Honest

Creating a new profile requires nothing more than entering the relevant username and password (twice). Although Password Sesame doesn't offer encryption facilities, each password you enter is always represented in 'xxxx' form, so someone looking over your shoulder won't gain see your information.

Scan's the man

Once you've entered your profile information, Password Sesame works best when you turn on the scan function. With this on, relevant passwords will appear as you visit sites. This works via a relatively ingenious (we think) system, whereby you type the 'Window caption' of the site involved. Confused? Well, the window caption is the text is the phrase that appears in the blue title bar at the top of any window you open. You don't even have to enter the exact phrase. In practice, this works a treat, although the pop-up window tends to keep appearing in site sub-pages, because they each have a window caption the same as the home page.



With the scan facility on, a dialog box pops up any time you visit a site known to require a password

For nothing, you can enter up to five accounts, and you get a hefty range of options to play with. The full 'deluxe' version only costs $10, so it might be worth shelling out for unlimited password management.

THE VERDICT

What's good:
Surprisingly easy to get the hang of. Good range of options to tinker with

What's bad:
Baffling use of completely unnecessary jargon might put off some users

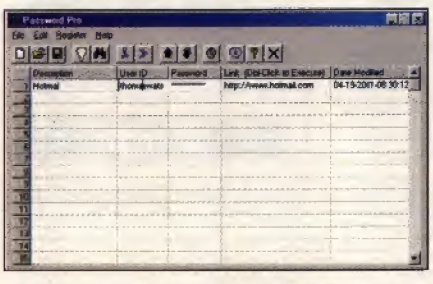
Overall ★★★★☆

3. Password Pro

Product: Password Pro 2.0.0
Company: CMB Software
Status: Shareware
URL: http://cmbsoftware.com

BASIC IS THE order of the day with this petite password wonder. Don't bother hunting around for secret additional functions, because what you see is what you get, and what you see isn't a great deal. What's more, the free version only lets you store three passwords, and you're going to have to splash out $10 for full unlimited action.

After the shock of the most bizarre nag screen you'll see (a cats and dogs screen saver, anyone?), you're confronted with a spreadsheet type affair. And this database style is at the heart of Password Pro – enter the relevant information in each row, and build up your account information. Conveniently, anything you enter in the 'password' is instantly transformed into 'xxx', keeping its treasures hidden from prying eyes. You can even generate a random password, if you struggle to come up with random letters and numbers on your own.



The simple, straightforward interface makes it difficult to mess up. It also makes it difficult to do anything but the basics

Easy access

One of the fields in the spreadsheet is saved for a link to the password site. Rather cleverly, you can enter both a URL and link to a program on your hard drive. This makes Password Pro ideal for those password-protected pieces of software, and anything you enter in this link field can be accessed with a simple double-click.

Alas, once you've completed this task, that's just about it. There are minimal copying and pasting options for transferring your password to the Web text box in question. You're going to have to rely on good old Windows Clipboard for your action on this front.

A plus point for Password Pro is the fact that, on saving each collection of passwords, you can then attribute a password to this file itself. Seeing as this will probably hold all of your passwords in the world, we suggest that you don't forget this one, or you're up the swannee.

The all-important save dialog box features a password protection option in itself

THE VERDICT

What's good:
Doesn't take a genius to figure out. Nifty encryption option to safeguard you

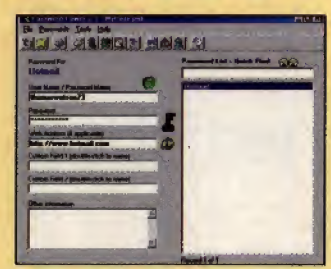
What's bad:
A tad basic compared with other password managers tested

Overall ★★★☆☆

4. Password Power

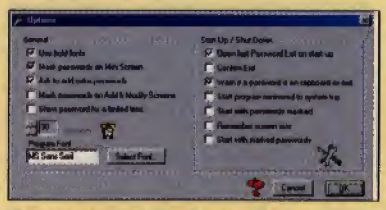
Product: Password Power 2.1
Company: WorldStart
Status: Shareware
URL: www.worldstart.com

WITH SOME OF the most garishly '1995-looking' icons we've ever witnessed, Password Power is never going to romp home with any beauty prizes. Having said that, the ugly interface hides a neat range of functions.



The phrase 'dog's dinner' springs to mind when you look at the unusual Password Power interface, but it does the job

The basic method of entry is the same here as elsewhere – you enter your username and password into the relevant text boxes one by one. But there are some neat tricks up its sleeve, including a hideous key icon that allows you to either show or encrypt each password you enter. You can even enter your own additional information in the custom fields, so you're not constrained to any of the standard settings.



There's a surprisingly decent range of program options for you to meddle with

Going online

As far as getting your information from Password Power onto Web site fields goes, a seemingly handy 'Copy' tool in the toolbar is supposed to sort you out. As far as we're aware, though, pressing any of the buttons in the dialog box that appears copies all of the account info onto the clipboard at once. This means you're going to have to paste, then chop up relevant sections yourself, which is a complete waste of time.

Although it has no encryption facilities, Password Power does allow you to 'hide' everything from view in the interface. Again, though, you're going to have to spend money for full use – this time $9 will see you through.

THE VERDICT

What's good:

Some intuitive and user friendly buttons to click for instant gratification

What's bad:

It looks grotesque. More complicated to use than it really should be

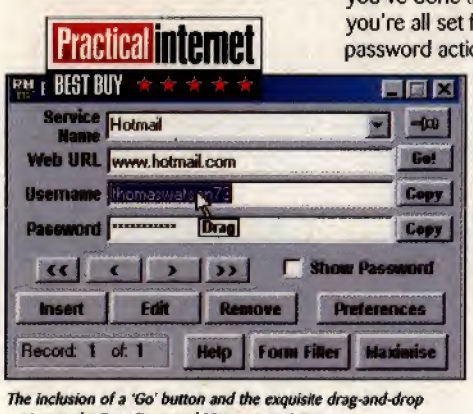
Overall ★★★☆☆

5. Easy Password Manager

Product: Easy Password Manager 1.17
Company: David Shattu
Status: Trial
URL: www.passwordmanager.co.uk

JUST WHEN OUR password pummelled minds were on the verge of collapse, along comes the astonishing Easy Password Manager. If you try one password manager from our cover CD this month, try this, for it is the best.

When you first open the program, it might take you a moment or two to realise you have to create a user account and password to make Easy Password Manager work. Once you've done this, though, you're all set for simple password action.



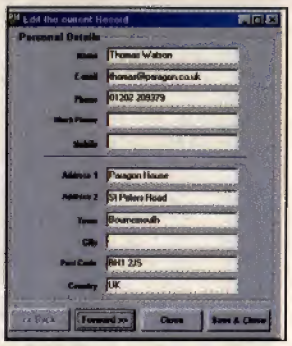
The inclusion of a 'Go' button and the exquisite drag-and-drop system make Easy Password Manager a winner

To create a new account, you merely click on 'Insert' in the main interface, and you're prompted to enter the relevant details – account name, URL, username and password are all you need here. The URL is particularly important, as there's a great 'go' button next to it, which will take you directly to the site in question. Like all of the best ideas, it seems stupidly straightforward – but this is the only program with such a function.

Drag-and-drop heaven

Getting your details from Easy Password Manager to text boxes on Web pages is also easier than anywhere else. Don't bother with the Clipboard here. Just run your mouse into the password box, and drag it into the text box in question. This truly drag-and-drop feature is sublimely straightforward, and takes lots of the guesswork out of transferring passwords.

There's a wealth of options as well to play with, as well as an excellent Form Filler, where you can store all of the personal and buying information you have to enter on some sites, saving you having to repeatedly enter the same details again and again.



For when you've got to enter personal and card information on a site, the form filler will save you valuable time

Considering you only have to pay a meagre £4 for the full version of this, we don't see how anyone can complain.

THE VERDICT

What's good:

Stunning wealth of features. Much easier to use than any other program we tested

What's bad:

You'll have to pay for it in the long run, even if it's only £4

Overall ★★★★★

QUICK TEST

NetObjects Fusion MX

Designing your dream Web site is a whole lot easier, with NetObjects' latest offering

Product: Fusion MXNamo
Company: NetObjects
Phone: 01883 745111
Price: £99
URL: www.netobjects.co.uk

RECENTLY, EVERYONE HAS jumped on the Web retail bandwagon via one of the hundreds of eCommerce packages that keep cropping up. With all of this, though, the art of building a decent, individual Web site has been lost amongst the forms, shopping carts and databases.

That's why programs like Fusion MX from NetObjects are becoming more and more of a rarity these days. Instead of instantly assuming that any online business presence must equate to selling products, this is a site designer, tailored for the more business-orientated of you out there.

Fusion MX follows the well-worn path set by other versions of NetObject's flagship WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) program. The basic concept remains the same – you follow the vast range of templates to set up the basics of your site, until you get to know the finer workings of the program. Once you've done this, you can either tinker with the built-in designs, or start from scratch, and create your own site. As far as templates go, you can choose from several content types, altering the facts and figures that appear within your site. This helps you to decide just how much information you want to include about your company or group, and forms the basis for your online presence.

Designing your page is easier than ever

Fun with editing

The real fun and games start when you come to edit the styles. For generations, Fusion has provided a decent range of these, which completely alter the look and feel of your site – from backgrounds to buttons, font to frame sizes. The choice has always been limited, though, to the range which comes supplied with the Fusion CD. Now you can click on a button within the program to be taken to the a huge collection of 'online styles'. There are millions of these, and the inclusion of a handy style browser means that you can see what you're downloading before making the effort.

The huge collection of online styles gives you plenty to choose from

As ever, the Fusion wizard is nothing less than magical in its ability to guide you through even the toughest of design issues. It's some of the newly-added features that help make Fusion MX even more of a winner than its predecessors. In addition to the online styles section, there's a wide range of online services for you to peruse. There aren't many WYSIWYG programs out there which manage to combine such an easy to use interface with features like online counters and traffic control, but Fusion MX does this with aplomb. In fact, whether you just want to mess around with site creation, or are desperately keen to develop your company's online presence, you can't really go wrong with the features within Fusion MX.

Many of the regulars in the Fusion Inn have been renovated. We've found previous versions to be cumbersome at best when it came to editing graphics on the page once they had been imported. This has been addressed in Fusion MX, with a far more professional-looking image manipulation tool in place.

Simple online publishing

Publishing your site to the Web has never been easier, either. Instead of the usual palaver, there's a handy 'publish' button in the main toolbar which, rather unsurprisingly, publishes your site to the Web for you.

Even the toolbar action has been refined for a more pleasant experience. For every main section of the program, available through the main toolbar, a secondary toolbar has been added, to make everything even more easily accessible. So, if you're working on the 'Page' itself, you're given a sub-section of 'HTML source', 'Page Preview' and 'Home'.

When push comes to shove, NetObjects Fusion MX isn't found wanting in the features department, and will sort out anyone keen to update their online presence.

THE VERDICT

What's good:
Excellent range of features and functions, all available to you in a simple interface

What's bad:
Aimed mainly at the business end of the market

Overall ★★★★☆

QUICK TEST

Illuminatus Opus

Enter the multimedia world quickly and easily with this impressive package

Product: Illuminatus Opus
Company: Digital Workshop
Phone: 01295 258335
Price: £99.95
URL: www.digitalworkshop.co.uk

WITH A COLLECTION of digital pictures on your hard drive, and a desire to turn them into something more than that, it's time to head off into the world of multimedia.

Unfortunately, the options available for achieving this have always been thin on the ground. On the one hand, you could either use the accepted Microsoft PowerPoint or a freebie package, giving you inflexible results. On the other hand, you could always shell out hundreds of pounds on a multimedia extravaganza that requires a degree in computing just to open.

Fresh from Digital Workshop, Illuminatus Opus is a fine example of affordable and easy to use multimedia creation. The premise is simple, yet allows for a staggering range of features and functions: you place elements on your page (or publication), and edit each one individually for full interaction.

Right-clicking on any object gives you access to more options than you're ever likely to use

Comparing Opus to PowerPoint is unfair, really, as it's much better described as a rival to the Flashes and Directors of this world. You can add photos, videos, interactive buttons and animations to your presentation, giving you an impressive array of control over just what is included.

Starting a new project is a doddle with the handy wizard providing an intuitive and helpful introduction. This option is a must for the first time user, though, as it's all too easy to lose yourself in the forest of functions.

Familiar face

The methodology behind Opus is similar to what you'd see in your standard word processing or DTP package. Adding objects is just a case of importing then placing them where you desire, slowly building up your presentation step by step. The main difference with Opus is that items can interact with one another, so you can create a button which will start a slideshow when clicked upon.

Click on the 'Properties' option for each item, and you are presented with the most comprehensive range of functions you're likely to see. Just as a taster, as well as being able to tinker with standard options, you can change the texture of whatever you're working on, to give it a more personalised look. That is just the beginning of what you can do, though, with advanced functions like the ability to change the drag and drop properties of individual items to enhance their interactivity with other objects giving you an idea of just what you can achieve.

Each image or piece of text, which can be edited in the standard format of course, can be designated as a button. This presents you with a whole new myriad of options, including where it should be linked to and what action should trigger it off.

If you choose to enter the slideshow arena, you'll have even more transitions, effects and timing options to play around with. Add to this the ability to fully configure the rest of your project to control elements within the slideshow, and you have all the functions you need to create something really stunning.

The joy of Illuminatus Opus is that, even with such a lengthy collection of options, it's a doddle to use. Because you only ever work on one item at a time, keeping track of what's going on is much easier than it could have been. And each of the options available to you is explained well, so you're never clicking blindly and hoping for a miracle.

If you've taken a whole load of digital pictures recently, and want to use them for something imaginative and different, Illuminatus Opus will sort you out, and quickly as well.

The standard drag and drop interface lets you place items anywhere on the project

A slideshow such as this, complete with transitions, is easy to achieve

THE VERDICT

What's good:
A wealth of features and functions. Cheap, and easier to use than Flash

What's bad:
Might take a while to pick up the more advanced parts

Overall ★★★★☆

HAPPIER BROWSING

Quick Fix Your Web Life

Improve the quality time you spend online with these tips and treats

Author:	Bruce Drurie
Publisher:	How To Books
Price:	£5.95
URL:	www.howtobooks.co.uk
ISBN:	1-85703-701-4

BOOK STORE SHELVES up and down the country are awash with guides to finding the best of the Web. This addition to the genre promises to inject a shot of fun into your online experience as well as sharing some supposedly hush-hush 'professional secrets' to improve the way you browse.

The 300 or so site reviews that have been crammed into the guide are neatly packaged into ten chapters including Food and Drink, Money and Careers. Smattered throughout these sections are a series of short tips which give pretty useful, practical advice on browsing, site design and boosting connection speeds.

The book makes a good rainy day read, and serves as a good source of amusement for adults and kiddiwinks alike. The text is free from jargon and it is illustrated with the Net exploits of a cartoon cat (don't ask us why). Not a tremendously comprehensive resource and it won't stretch the knowledge of more experienced Net users, but good for a giggle nonetheless.

Waiting around needlessly on the Internet? This book promises to show you where to go and what to do to make sure you get there faster

THE VERDICT

What's good:
Lively and inspirational Web site guide with some insightful tips

What's bad?:
Won't challenge the knowledge of the experts too much

Overall ★★★☆☆

SERVER-SIDE SCRIPTING

CGI & Perl in Easy Steps

Get to grips with Perl scripting and learn to master its functions

Author:	Mike McGrath
Publisher:	Computer Step
Price:	£9.99
URL:	www.ineasysteps.com
ISBN:	1-84078-027-4

GETTING YOUR HEAD around scripting can become an exercise in testing the pleasure and pain theory. When it goes wrong you're tugging at your follicles but making it work sends you dancing round the room in merriment. This book promises to steer you towards the latter state, and takes you on a journey through the ins and outs of passing server-side programs to the Web using Perl.

The book starts by covering the basics of writing Perl scripts and includes details of how to set up the interpreter and the editor. With the aid of screen shots, it moves on to tackle functions such as arrays, subroutines and pattern matching. We found the pace of the steps was pretty comfortable and yet it still gave us the confidence to dabble with settings and try things on our own.

With handy syntax tips and quick reminders on almost every page, the guide does a good job at translating fairly heavy-going scripting into something resembling the English language.

Become a master of scripts using this easy to read book

THE VERDICT

What's good:
Easy to follow walkthroughs used to illustrate practical scripting

What's bad?:
Functions are not covered in any huge depth

Overall ★★★★☆

E-BUSINESS

Clicks, Bricks and Brands

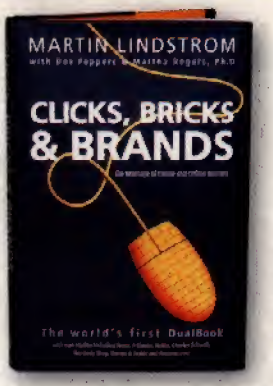
'Clicks and mortar' companies go under the microscope in this interactive book

Author:	Martin Lindstrom
Publisher:	Kogan Page
Price:	£25.00
URL:	www.dualbook.com
ISBN:	0-7494-3490-2

PENNED BY AUSSIE Internet guru Martin Lindstrom, *Clicks, Bricks and Brands* is smarter than your average hardback. In fact, it serves to eliminate a common problem among Internet books caused by the dizzying pace at which trends on the Net change. The title comes with an online companion called DualBook, which is designed to provide weekly updates to the book's topics, both on the Web and through email newsletters.

The publication itself is an eye-opening exploration of the changing face of retailing on the Net and in the high street. Lindstrom muses in a cohesive manner and provides some interesting case studies. The facts and figures provided in the book are coupled with links to pages on the DualBook site, where the information is brought bang up-to-date.

Though the site's content could do with a bit of improvement, the book makes insightful reading and has some practical tips for budding online shopkeepers.



With a handy online offshoot, this title aims to bring you comprehensive eCommerce advice

THE VERDICT

What's good:
Interactive online concept means the content is never out of date

What's bad?:
Slightly heavy on stats in places

Overall ★★★★☆

on the CD

THESE PAGES ARE WHERE YOU'LL FIND ALL THE DETAILS OF WHAT'S INCLUDED ON THE COVER CD AS WELL AS TUTORIALS ON HOW TO USE SOME OF THE PROGRAMS

Using the CD-ROM

The minimum recommended specification to run the *Practical Internet* CD is 800 X 600 screen resolution, 16Mb RAM, 16 bit colour, Windows 95/98/ME, Intel Pentium or compatible P90. We recommend that all users shut down all other applications while running the CD.

The CD will autorun in Windows 95/98. For users without autorun enabled go to the start menu, select RUN and type d:\PracticalInternet.exe (replacing 'd' with the letter of your CD drive) and press 'Return'. ***Please note**: This month's CD is PC only.*

Damaged discs

We will be please to replace any CD that is cracked, scratched or snapped upon purchase. Return them to the following address: Cover Disc Returns, Paragon Publishing, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS. If you experience technical problems, not due to physical damage on the CD, please DO NOT return any discs to us unless requested by the support team.

Missing discs

If you have purchased the magazine and have not received your CD, we will be happy to send you out a replacement disc. Email **subs@paragon.co.uk** quoting the magazine and issue number, full postal address and daytime phone number.

Problems using the disc

If you encounter problems using the CD or installing the software you can email **cdhelp@paragon.co.uk**. Questions will be answered twice daily.

Please provide us with as much information about the technical specifications of your machine and the software errors you are receiving as well as quoting the magazine and issue number in your email.

Our helpdesk team will be taking calls about disc installation problems on Wednesday afternoons between 2 and 6pm. Phone **01202 200259**.

NOTE: ***This service can only deal with problems when installing software from our CDs. Issues surrounding the use and purchase of software and all ISP queries must be referred to the relevant software publisher, merchant or ISP.***

The CD logo

Look out for this logo in the magazine. It tells you which of the programs mentioned in features, or explored in tutorials, are on the Practical Internet cover CD-ROM.

WEB SITE BUILDING MADE EASY WITH WEB! PERSONAL EDITION

FULLY WORKING PROGRAM! NO DOUBT FOR £40

Pick up the basics of our fabulous free WYSIWYG designer in minutes

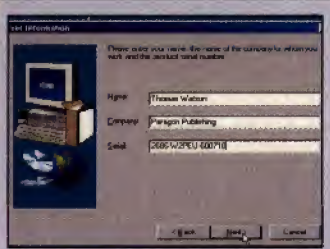
THERE ARE LOADS of WYSIWYG packages on the go, but the problem is that most of them cost money. That's why we're giving you a fully working version of the excellent Web! Personal Edition.

This easy to use program not only turns Web page creation into a doddle, but it also makes it fun. The interface is completely drag and drop orientated, making for a true 'What You See Is What You Get' experience.

Web! Personal Edition also makes it easy to create advanced effects for your Web site, including drop shadows, mouseover effects and sounds. Such seemingly complex functions are only a click away, thanks to the ease of use of the Web! Interface.

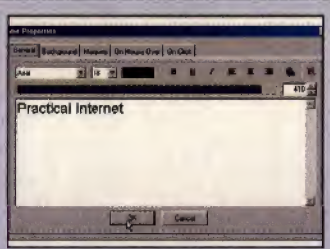
Before you install Web! Personal Edition, take note of the serial number which you'll have to enter during the installation process. The number is **2686-W2PEU-600710**.

CREATE A SITE NOW WITH WEB! PERSONAL EDITION



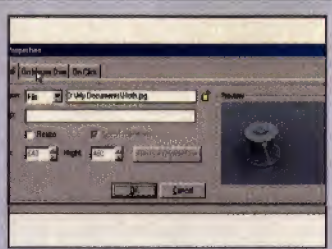
1 Install Web!

During installation, you'll be asked for a serial number, enter the following: 2686-W2PEU-600710. This will let you complete the installation of this fully working free product.



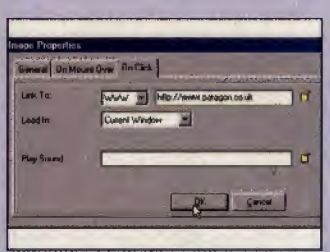
2 Creating text

Open Web! Personal Edition, and click on 'New document'. Click on the text icon in the main toolbar to enter your title text. Click 'OK', to move your text around the page.



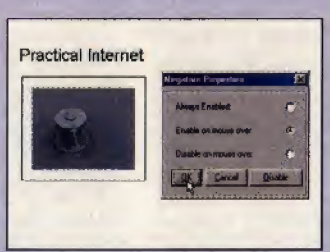
3 Insert a picture

To insert a picture, click on the picture icon in the toolbar, then click on the 'Folder' button in the dialog box to browse your hard drive for the correct picture to include.



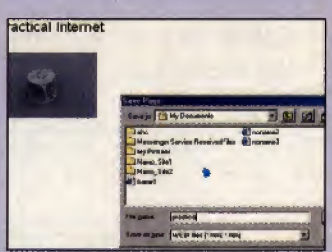
4 Creating a link

To turn your picture into a clickable link, press on the 'On click' tab in the picture dialog box. This lets you enter a link URL in the 'Link to' text field. Having done this, click on 'OK'.



5 Adding effects

It's easy to add an effect to your picture. Select the picture on the page, then go to 'Effects'. We've chosen 'Negative', which brings up an options box. In this, click on 'Enable on mouse over'.



6 Saving the site

To save your Web site to disk, click the floppy disk icon. In the browse box, move through your hard drive to find the relevant folder to save to, then click on 'Save'.

EROL 2 SMALL STORE

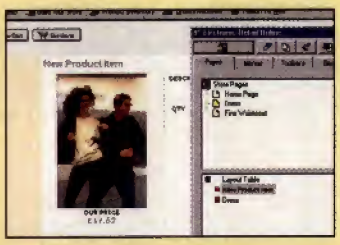
CREATE AND MANAGE YOUR OWN FULLY FUNCTIONAL ONLINE STORE AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR FANTASTIC SPECIAL OFFER TO UPGRADE TO THE FULL VERSION

FULLY WORKING PROGRAM! AS SOLD FOR £116

THROW YOUR DOORS open for e-business courtesy of EROL. This software lets you build functional online shops without the need for an encyclopaedic knowledge of HTML. Having said this, if you are a whizz with coding then you can really get your teeth stuck into the advanced design opportunities to create the perfect small store. To find out how to get your online store off the ground check out this month's *Your Business Online* tutorial on pages 90-94.

If you've enjoyed using EROL Small Store why not soup up your store and upgrade to the full version of EROL 2? The software poses no limitations on store layout or design and will take care of your day-to-day store management tasks such as stock control and order processing. Additional features not found in EROL Small Store include unlimited products, live multi-currency for your store prices and even more design controls.

We've hooked up with developers Dreamteam Products to offer *Practical Internet* readers the full version of EROL 2 at the low price of £329 plus VAT. To take advantage of this great deal simply order direct from the EROL Web site at **www.erol.co.uk/practicalinternetoffer** by 27 June 2001. You'll also need to have the Small Store serial number (displayed when you first install the software) in order to get the upgrade.

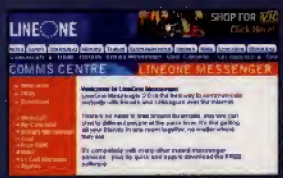


Instant enlightenment!

READ THE FEATURE ON PAGE 24 AND GET CHATTING

LineOne Messenger

KEEP IN TOUCH with your nearest and dearest with LineOne's instant messaging software. The graphical user interface lets you see exactly who's online and allows you to exchange greetings with them. It even features an email checking facility so you can stay on top of any incoming messages.

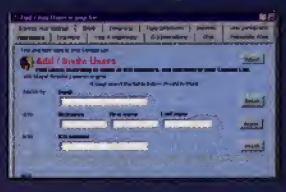


ICQ

THE WORLD OF ICQ has attracted over 100 million users so far and now you can be part of the community, too. The software allows you to send messages even if your buddy is offline. It also boasts voice chat capabilites and provides you with handy tools for finding your long-lost pals online.

PLUS!

AOL Instant Messaging
Go2Net Communicator
MSN Messenger
Screen Fire
Sonork
Yahoo! Messenger



MANAGE YOUR PASSWORDS

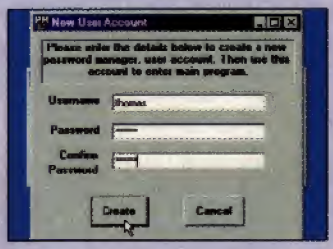
Sort out your Internet passwords once and for all

AS YOU SIGN up for stuff on the Web, you'll get a huge collection of passwords. It can be a problem to remember them all, and there's nothing worse than losing access to an email account because you forgot the password.

Walking away with the *Practical Internet* Best Buy award, Easy Password Manager is incredibly straightforward. It not only features incredibly secure encryption of your passwords, but also has a fine drag and drop system to transfer them from the program into your browser. Once you've installed and set this program up, you'll wonder how you ever survived before.

1 Create a new password

Start the program and click 'Done' on the information page that appears. You'll have to set up an account. This will create the main password and user details that will access all of our other passwords.

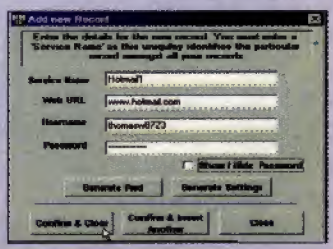


2 Enter your user details

Type in a username and password, which can be anything you like. This password is the main key that lets you into all other passwords, so make sure you take note of this.

3 Log in

At the main sign-in page, type your name and password. There's a pull-down list of all user accounts, so more than one person can use the program on the same PC. Select yours and type your password.



4 First password details

When the main interface opens, click 'Insert' to create a new Service. This will bring up the Service entry box. We've typed in the details of a Hotmail account. Click 'Confirm & Close' to go back to the main interface.

5 Pasting your password

Now click 'Go to visit the URL'. When your browser opens, go back to Password Manager and click on the username. Then drag this into the sign-in name field. Do the same with the password field.

6 Adding more services

Now we've sorted our first password, you can start adding more. If you really want to go to town, use the Form Filler part of the program to store those tedious credit card details, saving you even more time.

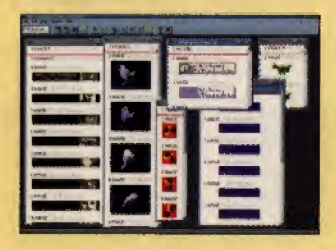
Add some sparkle to your Web site!

ALL THAT YOU NEED TO FASHION YOUR VERY OWN DAZZLING WEB SITE

GIF Construction Set Pro

Freeware, 4Mb

Create rip-roaring GIF images for your Web site with this easy to use program. It features an animation wizard that lets you put moving pictures together in a matter of minutes and combines several sophisticated tools that allow you to perfect the look. These include special effects, fast text banner creation, LED signs, rotation and stacks more. The extensive tutorials will put you well on the way to mastering the art of creating all-singing, all-dancing Web graphics.



Gate Keeper 3.2

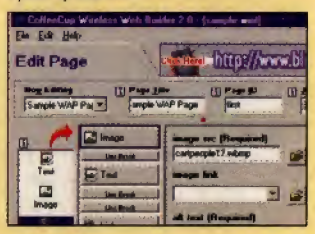
Freeware, 180Kb

This little snippet of JavaScript code can be used to stand guard over some or all of your Web pages to ward off anyone who is isn't welcome. Eliminating the need to fiddle with CGI scripting or server-side authentication, you can use the code contained here to restrict Web pages only to people who have a password. This particular version of Gate Keeper also includes a NoteTab clip to automate the generation of a protected page.

CoffeeCup Wireless Web Builder

Freeware, 2.8Mb

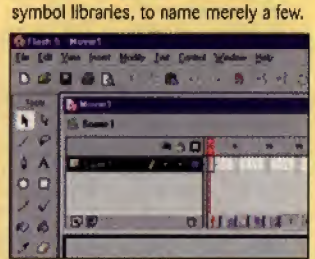
While WAP services have had their fair share of critics, there is still a lot to be said for having a Web site that can be accessed from a mobile phone or PDA. This piece of software from CoffeeCup includes a plucky wizard that lets you create, edit, and even publish your own wireless Web pages, meaning you don't need to enter any nasty WML code yourself. The program also comes complete with a basic image maker for you to build two colour bitmaps to spice up the site.



Flash 5

30-day trial, 19Mb

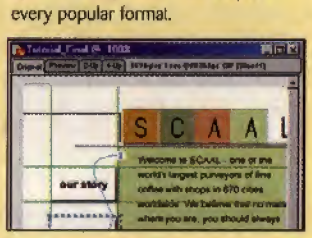
Flash has set the standard for interactive vector graphics on the Web. It can be used to adorn a site with spectacular effects such as compact navigation interfaces, technical illustrations and long-form animation. Movie clip and button actions can be used to create sophisticated interactivity without the need for scripting. This version boasts goodies like new user interface, FreeHand import, bezier pen tools and shared symbol libraries, to name merely a few.



Fireworks 4

30-day trial, 18.4

This Web graphics tool lets you doll your site up with all manner of buttons, image maps and GIF animations. Fireworks gives you a clear view of how your images will appear, as it lets you optimise and preview final output in every popular format.



SMARTER, FASTER BROWSING

Spruce up your Web browser with our range of gear for a faster, more effective online experience

Surf Snoop

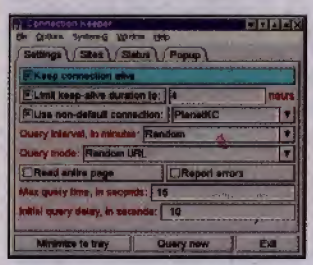
Freeware, 1.81Mb

This simple security utility helps you keep tabs on all the comings and goings on your PC, recording all visited URLs generated in either Internet Explorer or Netscape. The nifty little device runs in stealth mode and requires a specific hotkey to gain access to the log, which also notes user names, times and dates. Other neat features of the program include autoload with Windows and password protection. Unfortunately, this program does not support Windows 95.

Connection Keeper 4.1

Freeware, 757Kb

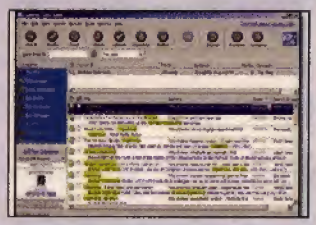
Losing a Net connection is not as careless as may sound, in fact many service providers will give you the boot if you stray from your machine for more than a couple of minutes . However, this program will gladly cling for dear life to that connection for you, preventing your ISP pulling the plug because of inactivity. Once up and running, Connection Keeper will ping remote hosts at a interval of your choosing. You can edit the list of these remote hosts to your heart's desire, and can keep the program in the system tray. Needs IE4 or higher.



Copernic 2001 Basic

Freeware, 2.4Mb

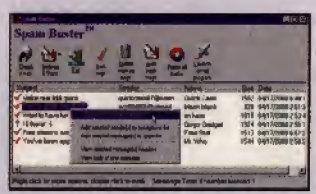
This handy little tool helps you smarten up your searches, allowing you to browse through the Web, newsgroups and email simultaneously. Copernic contains a flexible, user friendly interface that displays the history of searches so you can quickly thumb through your previous results. For tidier, more useful search results, the software can also be used to generate reports in Web page format letting you effortlessly browse results, remove duplicate matches and wipe out any invalid document links. There's a whole clutch of special features that are available for Internet Explorer, including a replacement for IE's default search window or a search bar that can be accessed directly from the browser toolbar.



Spam Buster 1.9

Freeware, 1.3Mb

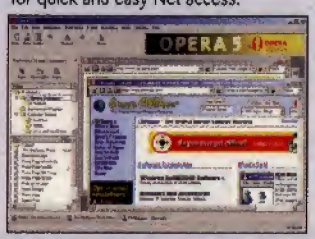
While Messrs Palin, Cleese and Chapman are famously big fans of the meat-based snack, the electronic version is not quite as popular. This program is designed to help prevent obnoxious spamming from darkening the doors of your email account. It includes a list of 15,000 known spamming addresses and allows you to configure rules for the header and for the From and Subject lines, even letting you preview email before viewing it. Spam Buster checks email for up to 12 different mailboxes and can be set to check automatically, sound an alarm or dump the spam without you having to lift a finger.



Opera 5.02

30-day trial, 1.99Mb

This version of Opera allows you to browse the Web in a completely different way. Versatile and user-friendly, the browser lets you ditch your mouse and start navigating the Internet using the keyboard. Couple this with its multi-window browsing capabilities and you have a great tool for quick and easy Net access.



A-Z index of software on this month's free CD...

Full products
EROL 2
Fully working. Requires connection to the Internet. Also requires your name and email address to register
Web! Personal Edition
Fully working. Requires this serial number: 2686-W2PEU-600710

Browsing
Accelerator Plus 4.3
Freeware
Adobe Acrobat Reader
Freeware
AnyMail
Freeware. Not supported for Win 95
ChargeMeter
Freeware
Compass 2.80
30-day trial
Connection Keeper 4.1
Shareware (requires IE4 or higher)
Copernic 2001 Basic
Freeware
DNS2Go
Freeware. Requires access to the Internet
Eudora 5
Freeware
Evidence Eliminator
Freeware
GoIZilla 3.9
Freeware
ICQ
Freeware
IE5 Web Accessories
Freeware
InoculateIT Personal
Freeware
Internet Explorer 5.01
Freeware
Launchpad
Freeware
Netscape 6
Freeware. Practical Internet and Netscape UK cannot offer tech support. We advise that only advanced users install it
Opera 5.02
30-day trial
Outlook Express 5
Freeware, part of IE5
RealPlayer 8
Freeware
Shockwave/Flash Player
Freeware
Sonique 1.51
Freeware
Spam Buster 1.9
Freeware
StayLive 2000
Freeware
Surf Snoop
Freeware (not supported for Win95)
WinZip 8
Freeware

Instant messaging
AOL Instant Messenger
Freeware
Go2Net Communicator
Freewdre
ICQ
Freeware
LineOne Messenger
Freeware
MSN Messenger
Freeware
Screen Fire
Freeware
Sonork
Freeware
Yahoo! Messenger
Freeware

ISPs
LineOne
Free Net access

Net workshop
Girafa
Freeware
GoIZilla 3.9
Freeware
Yahoo! Messenger
Freeware

Software reviews
Easy Password Manager
Shareware
Password Power
Shareware
Password Pro
Shareware
Password Sentry
Freeware
Password Sesame
Shareware

Site building
AudioGrabber
Freeware
Button Artist
Freeware
CoffeeCup Wireless Web Builder
Freeware
CoffeeCup FTP
Freeware
Digital Scroller
Freeware
Dreamweaver 4
30-day trial
Easy Applet Builder
Shareware
Fireworks 4
30-day trial
Flash 5
30-day trial
Font Creator
30-day trial
Gate Keeper 3.2
Freeware
GIF Construction Set Professional
Shareware
HTML Optimizer
Freeware
Human Click
Freeware
Paint Shop Pro 7
30-day trial
SubmitWolf Pro
30-day trial
Text2Web
Freeware
Traffic Attractor Lite 1.03
Freeware
X Cleaner
Freeware
ZoneAlarm
Freeware

Your Business Online
AddAce
Freeware
Bannershop 3.0
Fully working
Comparison Shopper
Shareware
Credit Card Verifier
Freeware
EROL 2
Fully working
Gama Gen Cart
Freeware. Not supported in Win 95
Invoice Store 4.0
Shareware
Meshware CEO
Freeware. Not supported in Win 95

Must-have software
1st Page 2000
Accelerator Plus 4.3
Active Marks
Active URLs
AOL Instant Messenger
Arachnophilia
Atomica
AudioGrabber
AVG Anti-Virus 6.0
CoffeeCup HTML Editor
CoffToHex
CyberKit 2.5. Not supported in Win 95
Dimension 4
EasyMTU
eGenie
E-Quill
Eudora 5
FreeAgent 1.2
Gate Keeper 3.2
GifClean32
HTML Kit
HTML Optimizer
HTTrack
ICQ
Inoculate IT
Internet Explorer 5.01
LeechFTP
MSN Messenger
Naviscope. Not supported in Win 95
NeoPlanet 5.2
Neotrace
NetMeeting 3.0
Netscape 6
Opera 5.02
Outlook Express 5
Powa Archiver
Putty
QuickNews Bar 1.0
Real Player 8
RealServer Basic
Shockwave/Flash Player
SiteUp MetaBuilder
Sonique 1.51
Spam Buster 1.9
TrueTech Webcam 2.2
Winamp
Windows Media Player 7. Not supported in Win 95
WinMX
X Cleaner
ZoneAlarm

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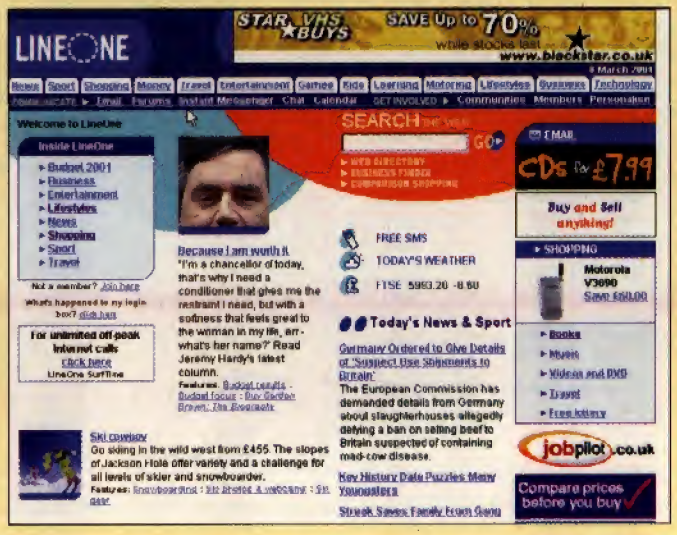
If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always got.
QiQ - Helping businesses do things e-differently.

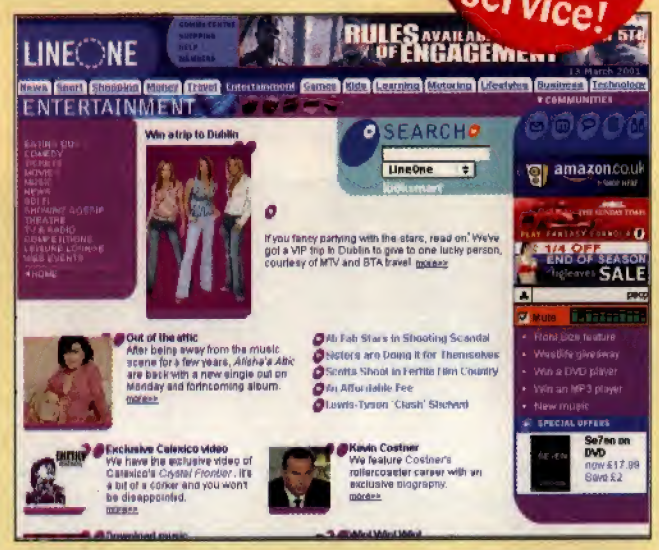
The Intelligent E-Business Consultancy

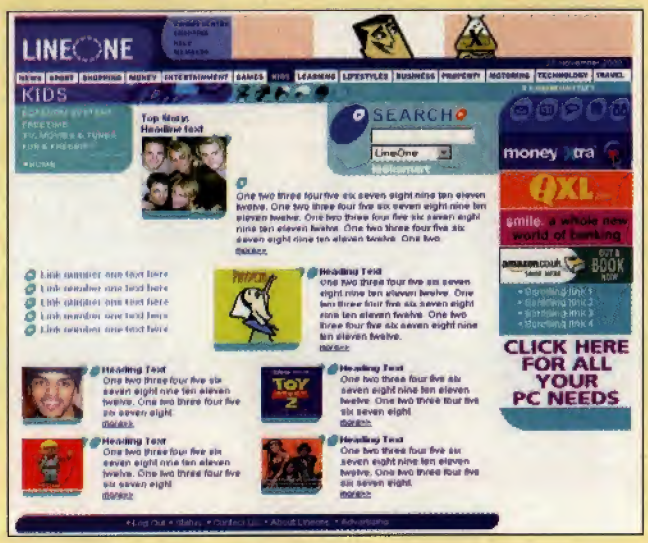
Get interactive!

Something to email home about

Service provider:	LineOne
Free time:	Life
Modem speeds:	K56 Flex, V.90, x2 and ISDN
Technical support:	support@lineone.net (free)
Sales enquiries:	0800 111210
URL:	www.lineone.net
Monthly rate:	Free
Annual rate:	Free
Platforms:	Windows







ONE OF THE main reasons people use the Internet is because of the new, fast and convenient methods of communication that the Net has opened up.

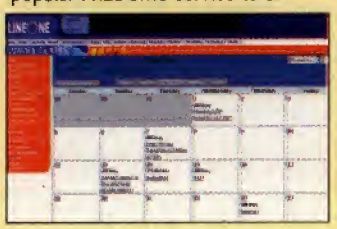
Email has rapidly established itself as one of the most popular forms of written communication, both for personal use and businesses across the world. However, there are now many more ways of communicating via the Internet than just email.

LineOne have always been at the forefront of innovation and pioneering exciting new developments on the Internet. The LineOne Comms Centre is one example of this and gives you access to everything you need to communicate over the Internet in one easy-to-use area.

Take for example LineOne Webmail. Unlike most other ISPs, LineOne's email is Web-based which means you can send and receive email from any PC in the world – just like Hotmail! As a LineOne member you'll automatically get five free email addresses to use straight away, plus 50Mb of free Web space and all the help and tools you need to build your own web site.

Free text messaging!

LineOne also offers a hugely popular FREE SMS service to all its members. The service allows you to send up to five text messages a day from your PC to any UK mobile phone, regardless of network, completely FREE of charge. Simply key in the mobile phone number of the person you want to send the message to, type in your message and click send. It's as easy as that.



As well as email and text, chatting in real time is also a very popular method of communicating over the Internet. Instant messaging services allow you to chat instantly by sending messages to a chosen recipient over the desktop. It's a great way of keeping in touch with people you already know. The new LineOne Messenger is easy to set up, has heaps of functionality including voice chat capability and is compatible with most other major instant messaging services such as AIM, ICQ and Yahoo! It lets you see who's online at any time and you can enjoy one-to-one or multiple conversations at the same time. Plus, as well as just chatting you can also send URLs and documents as attachments, making this service a really powerful alternative to email.

The Internet houses some of the largest communities in the world which tend to be built around foundations such as chat rooms, newsgroups, Web sites, games, email, Web pages, or any number of these services. Such communities are a great way of meeting new people and LineOne boasts one of the UK's liveliest online communities with over 1.6 million members. LineOne's many

chat rooms are an ideal place to chat in real time with other members, share interests and make new friends. You'll also have available to you a full set of newsgroups. Newsgroups are like message boards and you can post messages and communicate with other Internet users all over the world. No matter what you're interested in, you're sure to find a newsgroup that fits the bill!

Free Call Manager software

Within the LineOne's Comms Centre there's also other excellent products such as LineOne Call Manager (LCM) and My Calendar. With LineOne Call Manager you need never miss an important phone call again. You can receive phone calls and surf the Web from one phone line at the same time, so there's no need to pay for extra phone lines. You can choose to divert the call to voice mail or even take the call whilst you're online. And My Calendar is a complete online personal organiser that lets you manage and personalise information online from anywhere, at any time! It's easily accessible from any Internet-ready PC, Wap phones and palmtops and includes an electronic reminder service for you and your friends!

Another advantage of LineOne is that it's organised to help you cut through the clutter and give you quick and easy access to all the information you need. Industry research has constantly rated LineOne amongst the UK's fastest and most reliable service providers and if you can't find the information you want, LineOne's powerful search engine will present you with a list of the best sites on your chosen subject.

You can use the My LineOne feature to personalise your Home page and choose the topics you want to see every time you log on – share prices, restaurant search, business news, horoscopes... it's easy to choose whatever you want. Plus LineOne's eNews service will deliver the news of your choice to your inbox when you want it and Special Agents will hunt for information on a chosen subject 24 hours a day – even when you're not online – saving you money and time!

There's lots more fabulous things that can be enjoyed on LineOne including the very best in music and entertainment, the latest multi-player games, top line-up of celebrity writers, fantastic member offers in Shopping and Travel and much much more!

Enjoy the very best of the Internet with LineOne!

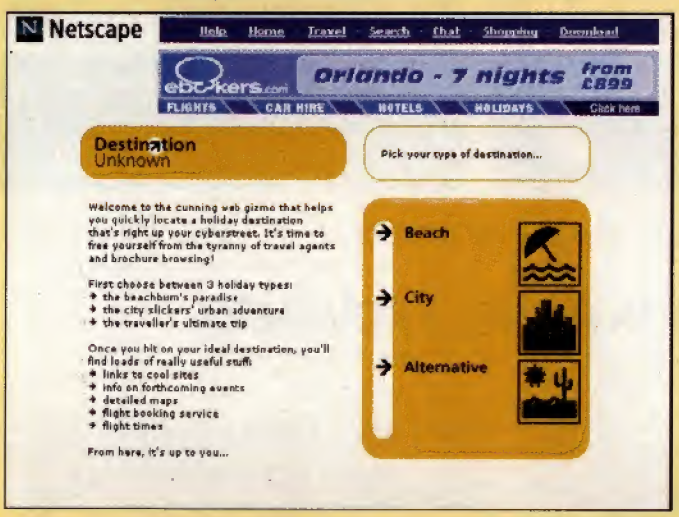
LineOne has recently completed a fantastic upgrade and redesign, including some great new products, confirming LineOne as one of the UK's most popular portals and Internet access providers. Here are just a few of the things you can look forward to when you join:

- Fast and reliable Internet access
- No monthly fees
- FREE text messaging
- Top celebrity line-up
- Fantastic member offers
- Instant Messaging and chat
- FREE multimedia CD-ROM

worth up to £29.99 when you join!

Simply load the cover CD on the front of this issue or call 0800 111 210 for your FREE Internet Start-up pack.

Service provider:	Netscape Online
Modem speeds:	Up to 56Kbps, V.90, ISDN, Dual Channel
Technical support:	0901 900 9000
URL:	www.netscape.co.uk
Monthly rate:	No membership fee
Platforms:	Windows 95, 98, ME, NT SP4 or 2, Windows 2000



Experience NETSCAPE ONLINE

THE Internet service from THE Internet company

IF IT'S INTERNET ACCESS with cutting-edge content you're after and you're not interested in paying a monthly subscription fee*, then Netscape Online is the service for you. Netscape Online brings you the complete Internet package giving you :

- Full access to the Internet with **Netscape Navigator**
- Unlimited email addresses with **Netscape Messenger**
- 20Mb Web space with **Netscape Composer**
- Live Chat with **Instant Messenger**

In addition, Netscape Online offers a whole host of it's own content that reflects the interests and lifestyles of it's users :

News

Like to keep on top of the latest news? Netscape News provides an up-to-the-minute service, with all the breaking news from home and abroad, updated 24 hours a day. With hard-hitting editorial and incisive analysis of the stories that matter, it is the complete online news resource.

Entertainment

Want to know what film to see or what's on TV? Netscape Online gives you the latest entertainment news, music and film reviews, MP3 downloads and even lets you book gig and theatre tickets online!

Travel

Need to get away? Plan your next holiday with the destination guides and online maps then book all your flights, cars and hotels without leaving your chair. You can also check out the latest in travel news to make sure you're fully prepared.

Netscape Online Shopping

Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in the privacy of your home and without the hassle of persistent salespeople. Whether you're a first-timer or an old hand, you'll love the shopping area.

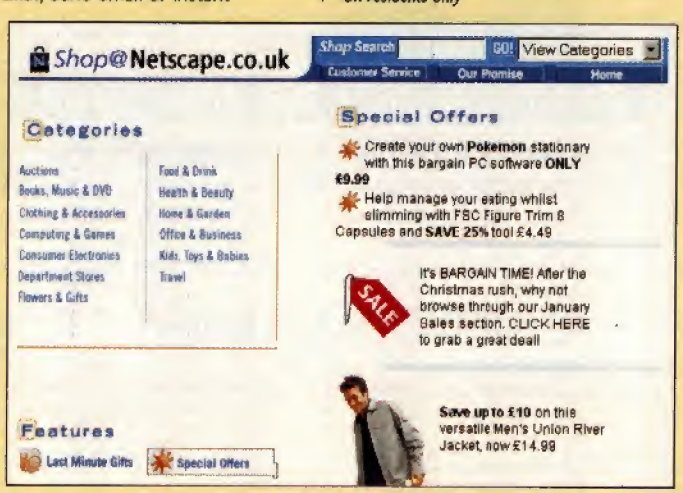
And a lot more...

Chat, send email or Instant Messages with any PC, anywhere in the world. Search the Web, read everything about your favourite sports or play games and a lot more...

So what are you waiting for? Load your cover disc now and browse the Web with the people who made it accessible in the first place!

www.netscape.co.uk

'Excludes telephone calls charged at BT rates. Technical support 0901 900 9000 charged at premium rate. Offer available to UK residents only



WHICH ISP?

THE UK'S MOST COMPREHENSIVE A-Z GUIDE TO INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS

ISP listings

DIRECTORY 152
If you can't decide which service provider to sign up with, read our guide.

QUICK TESTS 153
Each issue we test the performance of a group of different ISPs. This issue, Barclays.net, E-plus, UK Fantastic, RYA Online, EidosNet, Easynet Dial and Surf & Save are reviewed.

ISP NEWS BYTES 154, 159
Catch up on the latest ISP news.

HEAD-TO-HEAD 157
AOL and BT Anytime are compared.

UNMETERED INTERNET PROVIDERS

WHY SPEND MONEY ON YOUR INTERNET PHONE CALLS WHEN THESE SERVICES OFFER FREEPHONE NET ACCESS?

NAME AND URL	WEB SPACE	0800 ACCESS	COST	COMMENTS
0800Zgo www.0800zgo.com	20Mb	24 hours	£9.98	Any phone company. Gold & Platinum packages TBA. No cut-off period.
24 7Freecall www.24-7freecall.net	5MB	24 hours	£19.99	BT customers only. No cut off period. Initially open to 5,000 users.
Abel DIAL Anytime www.abel.co.uk	50MB	24 hours	£27.99	100-hour monthly limit. Has a 3-hour cut-off period.
Abel DIAL Leisuretime www.abel.co.uk	50MB	Off-peak	£11.99	50-hour monthly limit. Has a 3-hour cut-off period.
Affinity (SurfTime) www.affinityuk.com/surftime.htm	10MB	Off-peak	£9.99	Provides access to a growing list of ISPs using the BT SurfTime package.
Affinity (SurfTime) www.affinityuk.com/surftime.htm	10MB	24 hours	£25.99	Provides access to a growing list of ISPs using the BT SurfTime package. BT only.
AOL (FRIACO) www.aol.co.uk	14MB	24 hours	£14.99	Also available to non-BT customers. No cut-off period.
BigBlueSky www.bigbluesky.uk.net	No	24 hours	n/a	Provides unmetered Internet access for just £25 a year. No cut-off period.
BT Connect (SurfTime) www.btclickforbusiness.com	20MB	24 hours	£31.74	Business Internet service for the small office or home office worker.
BT Internet (SurfTime) www.btinternet.com	10MB	Off peak	£9.99	At other times, calls are charged at 2p per minute. Has a 2-hour cut-off period.
BT Internet AnyTime (FRIACO) www.btinternet.com	10MB	24 hours	£14.99	New FRIACO based product. BT line required
ClaraNet www.clara.net	50MB	24/7 and off-peak packages	Various	Unmetered 6pm-2am. FreeTime up to 12 hours off-peak access/month £4.99
Commundo www.commundo.co.uk	100MB	27/7 and off peak	n/a	30 minutes of unmetered access per day followed by 1p/min thereafter.
Connect25 www.connect25.co.uk	-	-	-	Now discontinued.
Demon Premier Connect (SurfTime) www.demon.net	20MB	Off-peak	£17.74	BT phone line required.
Demon Premier Connect Plus (SurfTime) www.demon.net	20MB	24 hours	£39.98	BT phone line required.
Eclipse Networking (SurfTime) www.eclipse.net.uk	10MB	24 hours	£19.99	As well as monthly BT fee, there is an annual cost of £89 + VAT. Business packages also available.
Eclipse Networking (SurfTime) www.eclipse.net.uk	10MB	Off-peak	£5.99	As well as monthly BT fee, also annual £50 + VAT. Business packages available.
Freechariot www.freechariot.net	50MB	24 hours	n/a	£15 fee & 1st month line rental of £32.89. Minimum of £8.99 p/m on calls required.
Freedom2Surf www.freedom2surf.net	25MB	Off-peak	£9.40	Need to download an application form. Payable by debit or credit card.
Freeserve HomeTime (SurfTime) www.freeserve.com	15MB	Off peak	£8.99	Introductory offer - £3.99 off until 1st March 2001. 2-hour cut-off.
Freeserve Unlimited www.freeserve.com	15MB	24 hours	n/a	Spend a minimum of £10 on calls p/m. or pay a £10 monthly fee.
Games-World (SurfTime) www.games-world.net	20MB	24 hours	n/a	18 months unmetered for £58.75 plus BT SurfTime payment of £19.99 p/m.
GreatXscape www.greatxscape.com	12MB	Off-peak	n/a	Transfer line to Telnet. Limited 20 hours free p/m. Local rate at other times.
Ic24 www.ic24.net	10MB	8pm-midnight every night	n/a	Local rate at other times. Offer ends 14th March 2001. 1-hour cut off period.
icScotland www.icscotland.net	10MB	8pm-midnight every night	n/a	Local rate at other times. Offer ends 14th March 2001. Has a 1-hour cut-off period.

SEVEN STEPS TO PICK THE IDEAL INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER

1 CHOOSE YOUR ISP TYPE

0800 FREEPHONE ISPS usually make a monthly subscription charge, but users are not billed for any Net phone charges.
FREE ISPS don't charge monthly subscription rates, but users do pay local phone rates when online.
PAY ISPS make a monthly subscription charge. Users also pay local phone rates when online. They are fast, reliable and offer top quality tech support.

2 GETTING SPEEDY HELP

If you're new to the Net, you will make lots of calls to the ISP's telephone helpline – so pick one with low cost support. See our listings for the prices.

3 GOT KIDS?

Pick ISPs like AOL which filter content, or use 'kids-only' ISPs like KidzNet (**www.kidz.co.uk**). Alternatively, get PC censor software that works with all ISPs.

4 ENJOY NET GAMING?

If you're a keen online game player, a dedicated fast ISP is essential. GamesWorld (**www.games-world.net**) is one of several services that supports Quake, for example.

5 NO WINDOWS? NO PROBS!

Freeserve, BT Click and Demon work well with Linux, while Mac users should consider Madasafish, AOL or AbelGratis. Windows NT is suited well to MSN and BigWig.

6 GONNA BUILD A SITE?

If you intend to build a Web site, check your ISP offers free Web space. Some provide unlimited space (2Mb will be ample) while others offer free domain names.

7 GET GLOBAL EMAIL

If your ISP offers a Webmail service you'll be able to access your email from anywhere in the world through a Web browser. This is handy for travellers and tourists.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH www.net4nowt.com net4nowt

NAME AND URL	WEB SPACE	0800 ACCESS	COST	COMMENTS
Intensive Networks (SurfTime) http://web.intensive.net	20MB	24 hours	n/a	18 months of unmetered access for £58.75 plus BT SurfTime payment of £19.99 p/ m.
IntY (SurfTime) www.inty.net	5MB	24 hours	£32.91	Sold as part of a business package.
Jings www.jings.com	Unlimited	24/7 and off-peak packages	Various	24/7 option £27.99 p/m and off-peak £11.99 p/m. Has a 4-hour cut-off period.
Kingston FreeTime www.kcltd.co.uk	20MB	Off-peak	£9.99	500 hours per month of unmetered access. Peak rate charged at 2p per minute.
LibertySurf www.libertysurf.co.uk	50MB	24 hours	n/a	Annual fee of £10. Limited to 4 hours per month then charged at 1p per min.
LineOne (SurfTime) www.lineone.net	50MB	Off-peak	£9.99	BT Surftime package, must be BT customer. Internet calls at other times charged at 1p p/m.
Madasafish www.madasafish.com	Unlimited	24/7 and off-peak packages	Various	24/7 costs £27.99 p/m and off-peak costs £11.99 p/m. Need to be an existing user.
MySurftime (SurfTime) www.mysurftime.com	20MB (extra)	Off-peak	£21.98	1p per minute at other times. No cut-off period. Includes .co.uk domain
NetGames UK www.nguk.net	25MB	24 hours	£25	Payment to be made by credit card. Has a 3-hour cut-off. Any phone company.
Nildram SurfTime www.getsurftime.co.uk	25MB	Off peak	£17.74	Peak access charged at local rate. 2-hour cut-off period. Other more expensive options.
Nildram SurfTime Plus www.getsurftime.co.uk	25MB	24 hours	£43.49	Has a 60 hour monthly limit. Other more expensive options available. 2-hour cut-off.
NoCallFee www.nocallfee.com	TBA	24 hours	£30	Set up fee of £30. A 128K connection costs an extra £30 per month. BT customers only.
ntlworld www.ntlworld.com	10MB	24 hours	n/a	Free for NTL cable customers as part of TV/phone package.
PlusNet (FRIACO) www.plus.net	Unlimited	24 hours	£19.99	CGI and FrontPage support. A 24/7 business option also available for £39.99 p/m.
PlusNet (SurfTime) www.plus.net	Unlimited	24 hours	£25.98	CGI and FrontPage support. A 24/7 business option also available. 24-hour cut-off period.
PlusNet (SurfTime) www.plus.net	Unlimited	Off-peak	£11.98	CGI and FrontPage support. 24-hour cut-off period. Very restrictive fair use policy.
Sniff Out (SurfTime) www.sniffout.net	Unlimited	24/7 and off-peak packages	Various	Uses BT Surftime package. Off-peak option at £9.98 p/ m and 24/7 option at £24.98
StrayDuck www.strayduck.com	25MB	24 hours	n/a	One week of 0800 access in three depending on average 0845 use.
SupaNet www.supahighway.com	20MB	24 hours	£12.99	Supahighway costs £10.99 per month for the first 3 months. BT line required.
Surfing Rabbit www.surfingrabbit.com	10MB	24 hours	£11.74	Also includes unmetered local voice calls. Subscribers limited to 1000 per day.
Telewest SurfUnlimited www.telewest.co.uk	30MB	24 hours	£10	Customers will need a telewest line and agree to spend a minimum of £10 / m on calls.
Totalise www.totalisetelecom.net	20MB	24 hours	n/a	2 years of unmetered access for a one-off fee of £235. 100 hours per month until 2001, then 24/7 package.
UKRTC (FRIACO) www.ukrtc.net	25MB	24 hours	£19.99	From the free ISP Mersinet. No cut-off period and special rates for 128K access. Web space supports FrontPage and CGI.
Virgin www.virgin.net	10MB	24 hours	£15	Service currently put on hold.
Vispa Connect (FRIACO) www.vispaconnect.co.uk	15MB	24/7 and off-peak packages	TBA	Subscribers will be limited with priority given to existing Vispa users. Available to non-BT users.
World Online www.worldonline.co.uk	12MB	24/7 and off-peak packages	n/a	24/7 - £14.99 p/m for 100 hrs then 1p per minute. Off-peak - £2.99 p/m for 50 hrs then 1p per minute.
Zoom www.zoom.co.uk	20MB	24 hours	n/a	Not accepting new users as we went to press.

FREE ISP DIRECTORY

YOUR AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO SUBSCRIPTION-FREE ISPS WHICH CHARGE ONLY FOR LOCAL CALL RATES

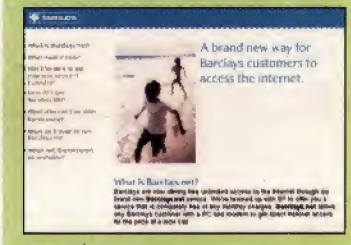
NAME AND URL	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL	WEB SPACE	NEWS GROUPS	TECH SUPPORT	128K ISDN
1jena.com www.1jena.com	None	Unlimited	25MB	25,000+	Local rate	Yes
4TheNet www.4thenet.co.uk	0870 740 1616	Unlimited	Unlimited	25,500	75p	Yes
4u2give www.4u2give.com	None	1	None	-	Normal BT rate	Yes
Abel Gratis www.abelgratis.co.uk	0906 680 4444	Unlimited	50MB	40,000+	25p	Yes
Ace Internet www.ace internet.co.uk	0870 740 7555	10	5MB	40,000	National rate	Yes
Adaption Software www.adaption-software.com/freenet.htm	0906 680 1234	Unlimited	100MB		25p	Yes
Alkazar Internet www.alkazar.net	01902 791 224	5	Unlimited	25,000	50p	Yes
Amlink www.amlink.co.uk	0121 247 2424	Unlimited	250MB	30,000+	Normal BT rate	No
AngliaNet http://free.anglianet.co.uk	01473 211 922	Fee payable	Fee payable	-	Normal BT rate	Yes
AppleOnline www.appleonline.net	0870 744 7700	Unlimited	25MB	25,600+	National rate	Yes
Arcinter.net www.arcinter.net	01246 541 113	5	10MB	30,000	50p	Yes
ArsenalNet www.arsenal.co.uk	0207 670 1174	5	5MB	-	50p	Yes
Barclays Bank www.is.barclays.co.uk	0800 494 949	5	No	-	National rate	Yes
Barlick.net www.barlick.net	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	-	75p	Yes
Barrysworld www.barrysworld.com	None	Unlimited	No	40,000	-	Yes
Beebware www.beebware.com	0870 740 4590	Unlimited	Unlimited	30,000	National rate	Yes
Blue Cross Net www.bluecross-free.net	None	5	10MB	-	50p	Yes
Boots Systems www.boots.com	0870 740 3979	Unlimited	Unlimited	25,500	75p	Yes

FREE ISP QUICK TEST

Barclays.net

www.is.barclays.co.uk

THESE DAYS IT seems that banks are becoming much more than just somewhere to keep your cash. The high street money keepers are keen to get involved in people's everyday lives, and Barclays is no exception. As a result, its customers can now enjoy free Internet access courtesy of Barclays.net.



Ease of use ★★★★★

Considering that getting a service from a bank usually involves filling in an encyclopaedia of forms, the registration process is surprisingly easy. You get the choice of completing a simple online form or you can phone up and request a CD. You then get an instructive welcome pack which tells you all you need to know about accessing the service.

Tech support ★★★★
tel. not currently available

Although the online support currently lacks depth, you can draw comfort in the fact that the Barclays.net support staff will be on standby to help you out until midnight every day. What's more you will only be charged at the national BT rate, so you won't be sucking up to Barclays for a loan next time the phone bill arrives.

Features ★★★

Budding site builders may feel that the financial giant is acting a bit of a Scrooge as it fails to deliver any free Web space. Email addresses are limited to just five and there is no support for newsgroups. However, the service does provide a gateway to the super-smooth world of Online Banking and also keeps you abreast of news and information.

Overall ★★★★

While the Web space and email addresses may be a bit limited for hardy Web users, the service is very user-friendly and the technical support is more than good enough. If you're a Barclays customer and are as enthusiastic about online banking as Robbie Coltrane is in the adverts, then this is a pretty decent ISP.

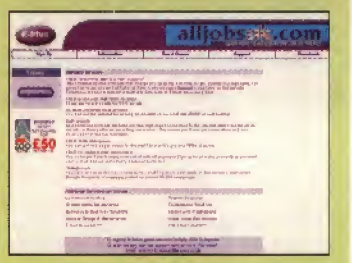
"Customers can now enjoy free Net access from Barclays.Net"

FREE ISP QUICK TEST

E-Plus

www.e-plus.co.uk

YET ANOTHER SERVICE running off the production line of free ISPs, E-Plus dares to go where most other providers have gone before. As a backbone provider with its own high speed Net connection, the ISP promises fast connections and speedy downloads from the Web.



Ease of use ★★★

We found the online sign-up hardly took up any time and just by answering a few simple questions we managed to get connected to the service. However, E-Plus fails to provide a facility for Net debutants as there is not a free CD in sight. This means you will need to already have Web access in order to get hooked up to the service.

Tech support
tel. 0870 743 4357 ★★★

There's plenty of places to turn if you lose your way (or your connection), as the service comes with telephone, email and online support. While calls to the E-Plus support desk are only charged at national rate, the office is only open during normal office hours. However, the helpful step-by-step online guide should rescue you in the wee small hours.

Features ★★★

While offering nothing new to the standard recipe we've come to expect from a free access provider, E-Plus gives you a healthy 25Mb portion of Web space along with as many email addresses as you want. The service also provides a stock of live news feeds on a range of different topics.

Overall ★★★

If this ISP was to be graded, it would probably warrant a couple more marks than an E-Plus as it does deliver in terms of email provision, Web space and online support. However, the overall look of the site and the part-time nature of the telephone support service means this ISP doesn't make the top of the class.

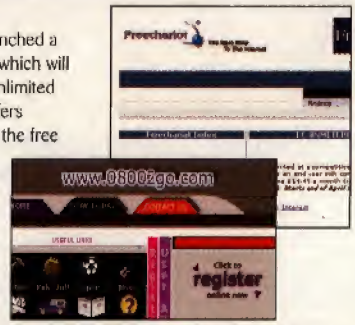
"E-Plus gives you a healthy 25Mb portion of free Web space"

NAME AND URL	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL	WEB SPACE	NEWS GROUPS	TECH SUPPORT	128k ISDN
BeSinternet www.besinternet.com	0131 248 5540	5	No	-	50p	Yes
Breathe www.breathe.com	0800 500 150	5	10MB	Full	50p	Yes
British Library Net www.britishlibrary.net	01937 546 585	Unlimited	20MB	Full	50p	Yes
BT Access www.btclickforbusiness.com	0800 800 001	10	20MB	Full	50p	Yes
BT Internet www.btinternet.com	0906 302 3456	5	10MB	Full	50p	Yes
Businessserve www.businessserve.co.uk	01524 380 200	5	20MB	-	Normal BT rate	Yes
Buy & Sell Net www.buyandsell.net	None	Unlimited	20MB	Unavailable	50p	Yes
CallnetUK www.callnetuk.com	0171 335 8300	5	20MB	Full	50p	Yes
Care4free www.care4free.net	0870 606 6334	5	15MB	Full	50p	Yes
CharityVfree www.charityvfree.com	0845 111 2323	Unlimited	15MB	"50,000"	Local rate	Yes
Citibank www.citibank.com/uk	0800 800 001	1 Webmail	No	-	50p	Yes
Clearsignals www.clearsignals.net	None	Unlimited	25MB	-	25p	Yes
Club 24 Internet www.club24.co.uk	0870 240 2202	Unlimited	20MB	29,000	50p	Yes
Connect4Free www.connect4free.net	None	Unlimited	20MB	Full	-	Yes
ContactBox www.contactbox.co.uk	0870 740 4404	Unlimited	25MB	30,000	£1	Yes
ConX www.conx.co.uk	0800 525 470	Unlimited	20MB	50,000	National rate	Yes
Dabsol www.dabsol.co.uk	0870 129 3983	Unlimited	Unlimited	34,000	50p	Yes
DellNet http://dellnet.excite.co.uk	0800 800 001	Webmail	No	-	50p	Yes
Devilnet UK www.devilnet.co.uk	0870 741 0947	Unlimited	25MB	35,000	50p	Yes
Dial Start www.dialstart.net	0870 729 7579	Unlimited	20MB	35,000+	50p	Yes
Dizzi www.dizzi.net	0906 201 2302	Unlimited	25MB	25,000+	25p	Yes
Doctors.Net www.doctors.net.uk	01235 828 400	1	3MB	-	Local rate	Yes
Doodah www.doodah.co.uk	01902 791 224	25	Unlimited	25,000	£1	Yes
EarthLink www.earthlink.co.uk	None	Unlimited	25MB	-	75p	Yes
Ecosse www.ecosse.net	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	-	-	Yes
FidosNet www.eldosnet.co.uk	0906 600 0293	Unlimited	20MB	Full	50p	Yes
E-Plus www.e-plus.co.uk	None	Unlimited	15MB	30,000+	National rate	Yes
Esat Clear www.esatclear.ie	1800 923 111	Unlimited	10MB	30,000+	58p	Yes
Eseeinternet www.eseeinternet.com	01706 655 885	Unlimited	10MB	-	-	Yes
Euphony.net www.euphony.net	0845 333 3466	Unlimited	Unlimited	33,000+	50p	Yes
Eurobell www.eurobell.net	01293 405700	Unlimited	5MB	18,000+	Normal BT rate	Yes
F.I.S. www.freeispshares.co.uk	0870 701 1170	Unlimited	25MB	25,000+	National rate	Yes
Farming Online www.farming.co.uk	0116 202 2000	Unlimited	No	40,000+	50p	Yes

ISP NEWS

FREECHARIOT RIDES AGAIN

Former unmetered stalwart Freechariot (**www.freechariot.co.uk**) has launched a new range of accounts based on BT's FRIACO offering. These services, which will replace those killed off at the end of March, are split into two. The FC Unlimited account offers 24/7 access for £14.49 a month, while FC Home Lite offers unmetered access for five hours a day for £5.99 a month. Interestingly, the free hours are set between midday and 5pm, making Freechariot the first unmetered ISP to genuinely aim at the housewife/student market.



08002GO FINALLY GOES ONLINE

Culminating an on-off saga that made the Phil Mitchell shooting look like a nursery rhyme, the 08002go (**www.08002go.com**) unmetered service has finally kicked off. Originally expected to launch in June 2000, the constant delays have seen an increasingly weary band of potential users turning their attention elsewhere. And just to make matters worse, early adopters of the £9.98 a month service complained in droves about difficulties in connecting and constant engaged tones. Looks like all is not well in the 08002go garden at this moment in time.

SUPANET GETS ON THE SUPAHIGHWAY

Supanet (**www.supanet.com**) has announced details of a 24/7 service called 'Supahighway'. Costing £12.99 a month, users will have to sign up for a year, although early subscribers are no doubt toasting their good fortune at only having to pay £10.99 for the first three months.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH www.net4nowt.com net4nowt

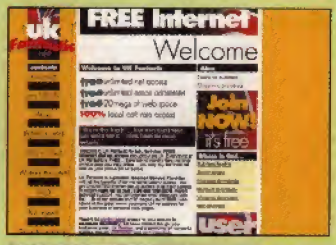
NAME AND URL	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL	WEB SPACE	NEWS GROUPS	TECH SUPPORT	128K ISDN
Fire-Bug www.fire-bug.com	None	Unlimited	50MB	Full	-	Yes
Floom.net www.floom.net	None	None	None			Yes
Flyer Internet http://internet.flyer.co.uk	0700 284 2867	Unlimited	25MB	30,000+	50p	Yes
Free Gratis www.freegratis.net	01635 573 300	5	5MB	155,244	Normal BT rate	Yes
Free ISP www.freeisp.co.uk	None	Unlimited	25MB	Full	-	Yes
Free UK www.freeuk.net	0900 900 0900	Unlimited	25MB	50,000+	50p	Yes
Free4All www.free4all.co.uk	01303 775 500	Unlimited	25MB	45,000	National rate	Yes
Freebeeb www.beeb.net	None	Unlimited	20MB	20,000+	60p	Yes
Freecall-UK www.freecall-uk.co.uk	None	Unlimited	No	Unavailable	25p	Yes
Freedom 2 Surf www.freedom2surf.net	0181 881 2111	Unlimited	25MB	30,000	Normal BT rate	Yes
FreeInternet www.free-internet.co.uk	0900 980 1666	5	10MB	Full	50p	Yes
Free'N'Easy www.freeneasy.net	0115 844 0304	Unlimited	Unlimited	37,000+	Normal BT rate	Yes
FreeNet www.freenet.co.uk	0870 072 2622	Unlimited	25MB	35,000	National rate	Yes
Freenetname www.freenetname.co.uk	0800 376 6910	Unlimited	20MB	30,000+	Free	Yes
Freeola.net www.freeola.net	01279 321 321	Unlimited	25MB	Full	National rate	Yes
Freeserve www.freeserve.co.uk	0990 500 049	Unlimited	15MB	31,000	50p	Yes
Freeway UK www.freewayuk.com	0845 355 5555	5	20MB	Full	50p	Yes
Freewire www.freewire.net	0906 716 0550	Unlimited	50MB	40,000	50p	Yes
FreeZone www.freezone.co.uk	0870 744 1111	Unlimited	20MB	35,000	Local rate	No
FSBDial www.fsbdial.co.uk	0870 072 2622	Unlimited	None	30,000+	National rate	Yes
Games Terminal www.gterminal.net	0870 606 0054	Unlimited	20MB	60,000	National rate	Yes
Games-World www.games-world.net	0870 161 0102	1	10MB	55,000+	National rate	Yes
Gateway www.gateway2000.co.uk	0800 552 000	5	15MB	Full	£1	Yes
Gay Webmasters Guild http://gay.webmastersguild.co.uk	0870 088 5454	20	Negotiable	-	National rate	Yes
GayServe www.gayserve.co.uk	0906 201 2302	Unlimited	25MB	25,000+	25p	Yes
Genie Internet www.genie.co.uk	0800 214 000	1	20MB	34,000+	50p	Yes
Get Free Internet www.getfreeinternet.co.uk	0800 169 4383	Unlimited	5MB	Unavailable	50p	Yes
Get-The-Web www.get-the-web.com	None	Unlimited	100MB	-	25p	Yes
Global Nomad www.globalnomad.co.uk	0906 960 0061	1	No	-	50p	Yes
Golfree www.golfree.co.uk	0906 690 3313	Unlimited	20MB	40,000	50p	Yes
Go-Legend www.go-legend.net	01274 743 500	Unlimited	10MB	41,000+	50p	Yes
Golfzone www.golfzone.co.uk	01277 366 090	5	10MB	25,000+	50p	Yes
GoThere Internet www.gothere.uk.com	0870 321 1540	Unlimited	Unlimited	Full	25p	Yes
GPAnet www.gpanet.co.uk	None	Unlimited	25MB	26,000	50p	Yes
Greatxscape www.greatxscape.com	0161 972 7215	Unlimited	12MB	35,000	Normal BT rate	Yes
Handbag.com www.handbag.com	None	20	None	-	50p	Yes
HBC21 www.hbc21.com	None	No	No	-	-	Yes
Hemscott.net www.hemscott.net	020 7278 7769	5	20MB	Full	50p	Yes
Here.co.uk http://portal.here.co.uk	01509 234 505	Unlimited	Unlimited	64,000+	National rate	Yes
HMV http://hmv.yahoo.co.uk	0906 302 1200	Unlimited	No	-	50p	Yes
Hotlinks www.hotlinks.co.uk	0181 883 0000	No	No	-	National rate	Yes
Hot-Toast www.hot-toast.com	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	30,000	50p	Yes
i12 www.i12.com	0870 444 1112	Unlimited	500MB	34,000+	National rate	Yes
IC24 www.ic24.net	0870 909 0262	5	10MB	51,000	50p	Yes
ICLWAY www.iclway.co.uk	None	5	15MB		Local rate	Yes
Icom43 www.icom43.net	01743 340 034	Unlimited	15MB	-	75p	Yes
In2Home www.in2home.net/signup	0800 0370 370	5	15MB	30,000+	60p	Yes
iNet Wales www.inet-wales.co.uk	None	Webmail only	No	-	50p	Yes
Intelynx www.intelynx.net	01243 544 404	Unlimited	20MB	18,000	75p	Yes
Internet-Today www.internet-today.co.uk	0906 756 0048	Unlimited	15MB	30,000	75p	Yes
Intu www.intu.co.uk	0701 071 071 2	Unlimited	25MB	56,000+	25p	Yes

FREE ISP QUICK TEST

UK Fantastic

www.ukfantastic.net

AS ONE OF the first free Internet access providers to hit PC screens a couple of years ago, UK Fantastic has more experience under its belt than most of its rivals. The ISP makes the bold promise of "providing fast and reliable Internet access that is second to none."



Ease of use ★★★★

The online sign-up procedure is so straightforward it could probably be successfully negotiated by a mentally-stunted chimp. You simply enter your name, address, phone number and email address, and then UK Fantastic generously sends you all of the log in information along with the relevant dial-up numbers. We would have liked to see a sign-up CD, though.

Tech support ★★★
tel. 0906 758 2063

The technical support desk is open at any time of day or night, but we'd recommend that you only use it in extreme emergencies as you need to cough up a wallet-busting 75p a minute for the privilege. Thankfully, the online help centre provides ample illustrated walk-through guides and troubleshooting aids, for both Windows and Mac users.

Features ★★★★

As well as bundling together a tidy package of unlimited free email addresses and 20Mb of free Web space, the ISP also comes with a number of 'Fantastic' extras. These include a software download for making real-time phone calls online and a classified ads section. There is also a useful help section on uploading your Web pages.

Overall ★★★★

This no-nonsense service provider does a sterling job at delivering quick, sturdy connections and although other outfits offer more in the way of Web space, the amount offered by UK Fantastic should be sufficient for the home user. What's more, there are plenty of free downloads and special offers and available through the service. Fantastic!

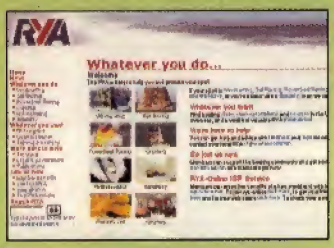
"This no-nonsense service provider does a sterling job"

FREE ISP QUICK TEST

RYA Online

www.rya-online.net

IF YOU ENJOY taking to the high seas in your spare time then this ISP, run by the Royal Yachting Association, could put the wind into your online sails. The sailing theme runs through the whole service, from the boating-related Web portal to the free email aliases.



Ease of use ★★★★

It's very simple to get yourself rigged up to the service and is a matter of filling in your name and email address and downloading the dial-up software, which takes just a few moments. There's also a facility for requesting a start-up CD if your PC is not currently blessed with Net access.

Tech support ★★★
tel. 0906 302 0230

Try as we might we were unable to track down very much in the way of online help. However, users aren't left totally up the creek without a paddle as the RYA support team are available direct by email or telephone. You will get walloped for 50p a minute on the phone lines so its probably best to try and stick to the email support except in emergencies.

Features ★★★

Although the offer of unlimited email addresses and 10Mb of Web space isn't exactly going to set imaginations racing, the home page contains a bucketload of links to various marine and yachting resources. Predictably perhaps, the page is also full of information on how to join the Royal Yachting Association.

Overall ★★★

The overall Net access package offered by RYA Online is pretty bog standard when compared to the rest of the known free ISP world. Despite this, the wealth of specialist resources and the chance to have your email address associated with such an organisation makes this a great service for boat enthusiasts and people with an interest in watersports.

"The wealth of specialist resources makes this a great service for boat enthusiasts"

NAME AND URL	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL	WEB SPACE	NEWS GROUPS	TECH SUPPORT	128K ISDN
IofM.net www.iofm.net	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	-	50p	Yes
Islam Direct www.islamdirect.com	0705 005 7050	5	20MB	30,000	50p	Yes
ItsGoodToGive www.itsgoodtogive.co.uk	07074 550 551	1	None	-	-	Yes
IXUK www.ixuk.com	0906 690 3315	Unlimited	20MB	Full	50p	Yes
JellyPeople.com www.jellypeople.com	None	Unlimited	25MB	60,000+	25p	Yes
Jings www.jings.com	0141 931 7000	Unlimited	Unlimited	40,000+	National rate	Yes
Jolt www.jolt.co.uk	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	-	-	Yes
JungleLink www.junglelink.net		Unlimited	10MB	32,000	50p	Yes
Kickon www.kickon.com	None	10	15MB	-	60p	Yes
Kingston NetTime www.keltd.co.uk	01482 602 100	Unlimited	20MB	Unavailable	Normal BT rate	Yes
Kirion www.kirion.com	0906 751 2066	Unlimited	25MB	30,000	75p	Yes
Knowall www.knowall.co.uk	08001 38 34 38	?	10MB	?	?	No
KZuk.net www.kzuk.net		Unlimited	Unlimited	-	50p	Yes
LibertySurf www.libertysurf.co.uk	0870 987 5555	Unlimited	50MB	-	National rate	Yes
Lifestyle www.lifestyle.co.uk	None	Unlimited	25MB	Full	75p	Yes
LineOne www.lineone.net	0800 111 210	5	50MB	35,000+	50p	Yes
LogicSurf Internet www.logicsurf.net	None	Unlimited	15MB	51,000+	National rate	Yes
Loyal Mail www.loyalmail.co.uk	0163 381 1840	Unlimited	25MB	56,000	Free	Yes
Madasafish www.madasafish.com	0800 027 3373	Unlimited	Unlimited	40,000+	Normal BT rate	Yes
ManUFree.net www.manutd.com/manufreenet	0161 868 7000	5	20MB	Full	50p	Yes
Max2 www.max2.co.uk	0702 116 6175	Unlimited	25MB	25,000+	£1	Yes
Mersinet www.mersinet.co.uk	0700 046 3774	Unlimited	25MB	56,000+	25p	Yes
Messages www.messages.co.uk	0702 096 6442	Unlimited	25MB	35,000	-	Yes
Micromundi.net www.micromundi.net	01422 370 555	Unlimited	No	-	Normal BT rate	Yes
Millionserve www.millionserve.net	01924 274 444	Unlimited	25MB	25,000+	75p	Yes
Ministry of Sound www.ministryofsound.net	0906 676 7678	Unlimited	20MB	35,000+	50p	Yes
Minx www.minx.co.uk	0705 068 6295	Unlimited	Unlimited	3,000	75p	Yes
MSN Freeweb www.msnfreeweb.co.uk	0345 002 000	Webmail	No	-	National rate	Yes
MT Click www.mtclick.com	None	Webmail	No	-	-	Yes
MWfree.net www.mwfree.net	None	Unlimited	20MB	33,800	50p	Yes
MyETI www.eti.uk.com	0800 056 2696	Unlimited	15MB	20,000+	50p	Yes
NASCR www.nascr.net	0906 690 9192	Unlimited	20MB	35,000+	50p	Yes
Nationwide www.nationwide.co.uk	0345 302 010	5	10MB	60,000	50p	Yes
Natwest.com www.natwest.com	0800 50 50 50	Webmail	No	-	50p	Yes
NetDirect Online www.instant.ndo.com	0800 731 3311	Unlimited	20MB	60,000+	National rate	Yes
Netscape Online www.netscapeonline.co.uk	0901 900 9000	Unlimited	20MB	27,000	50p	Yes
NHS People www.nhspeople.net	None	5	15MB	10,000+	50p	Yes
Nownet www.nownet.co.uk	?	5	15MB	?	?	No
NTL World www.ntlworld.com	0800 052 2000	5	10MB	30,000	£1	Yes
Oceanfree www2.oceanfree.net	None	Unlimited	No	-	£1	Yes
Oik www.oik.co.uk	0870 740 1474	5	No	Full	£1	Yes
Onet www.onet.co.uk	0870 747 4741	Unlimited	30MB	?	50p	Yes
Orange.net www.orange.net	0500 802 080	1	15MB	30,000	50p	Yes
OrchidServe www.orchidserve.com	None	Unlimited	20MB	-	75p	Yes
Oxfree www.oxfree.com	01865 799 222	Unlimited	20MB	31,000	Normal BT rate	Yes
PeoplesNet www.peoplesnet.net	None	5	25MB	Unavailable		Yes
Photoshot www.photoshot.com	0870 870 8765	5	15MB	Full	50p	Yes
PlusNet www.plus.net	0870 705 8000	Unlimited	Unlimited	70,000+	National rate	Yes
POBox www.pobox.co.uk	None	1	None	-		Yes
Prontoserve www.prontoserve.net	0845 624 1889	Unlimited	25MB	40,000+	50p	No
Quista www.rbos.co.uk/quista	0800 028 3815	5	10MB	Full	-	Yes

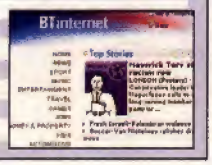
IN ASSOCIATION WITH www.net4nowt.com net4nowt

NAME AND URL	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL	WEB SPACE	NEWS GROUPS	TECH SUPPORT	128K ISDN
RapiDial www.rapidial.co.uk	0906 691 2912	Unlimited	25MB	26,000	50p	Yes
Route56 www.route56.co.uk	08700 12 1234	Unlimited	5MB	33,000+	National rate	Yes
RugbyWeb www.rugbyweb.co.uk	0411 970 095	Unlimited	20MB	Full	50p	Yes
RYA On-Line www.rya-online.net	0906 302 0230	Unlimited	10MB	-	50p	Yes
Scannet www.scannet.co.uk	None	3	5MB	Full	-	No
SchoolMfree www.schoolmfree.com	0800 052 6179	Unlimited	15MB	50,000	Local rate	Yes
Scotfree-UK www.scotfree-uk.net	0870 741 0513	5	25MB	Full	60p	Yes
Sheetmetal.com www.sheetmetal.com	0208 350 1251	Webmail	None	-	Normal BT rate	Yes
Shetland Internet www.shetland.co.uk	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	-	-	Yes
Skynow www.skynow.co.uk	0870 905 9905	5	25MB	Unavailable	25p	Yes
Sniff Out www.sniffout.net	01883 742 510	Unlimited	Unlimited	55,000	Local BT rate	Yes
South West Net www.swest.co.uk	01392 201 698	Unlimited	25MB	26,000	National rate	Yes
Sparticus.net www.sparticus.net	0870 740 6115	Unlimited	25MB	35,000+	60p	Yes
Sprintnet www.sprintnet.co.uk	None	Unlimited	5MB	-	-	Yes
StayFree www.stayfree.co.uk	0116 291 0909	Unlimited	5MB	Full	Normal BT rate	Yes
StormNet www.storm-online.com	None	5	50MB	Full	50p	Yes
StrayDuck www.strayduck.com	0845 660 9000	Unlimited	25MB	25,000	60p	Yes
Supanet www.supanet.com	None	Unlimited	20MB	Full	50p	Yes
Surf&Save www.surfandsave.co.uk	0500 240 500	5	10MB	25,000+	50p	Yes
Surf3 www.surf3.net	None	Unlimited	15MB	25,000+	75p	Yes
Surfree www.surfree.co.uk	023 80 571300	1	15MB	-	Normal BT rate	Yes
Tellnet www.tellnet.co.uk	0870 600 1501	Unlimited	25MB	Full	Local rate	Yes
TescoNet www.tesco.net	0345 225 533	5	10MB	30,000	50p	Yes
The Hornets www.thehornets.net	None	6	20MB	40,000	50p	Yes
The Mail www.themail.co.uk	01424 830 907	1	50MB	3,000	60p	Yes
Themutual.net www.themutual.net	0171 831 1110	5	25MB	32,481	50p	Yes
The-Whale.com www.the-whale.com	None	5	10MB	Unavailable	50p	Yes
Thrust World www.thrustworld.com	0870 737 7701	None	None	-	-	Yes
Tiny Online www.tinyonline.net	0845 301 1458	5	15MB	30,000	50p	Yes
Tollon www.tollon.net	0800 542 6549	5	5MB	-	50p	Yes
Totalise www.totalise.net	0113 394 9000	Unlimited	20MB	Unavailable	50p	Yes
Totalserve www.totalserve.co.uk	0906 300 1105	Unlimited	Unlimited	35,000+	50p	Yes
UK Fantastic www.ukfantastic.net	0702 110 4458	Unlimited	20MB	18,000	75p	Yes
UK Online www.ukonline.co.uk	0800 053 0613	Unlimited	Unlimited	11,000	25p	Yes
UK2.net http://uk2.net	None	Webmail	No	-	-	Yes
UK4FREE www.uk4free.net	None	1	20MB	55,000	£1	Yes

HEAD TO HEAD AOL Vs BT ANYTIME

TWO FREEPHONE ISPs COMPARED

AOL		BT Anytime
www.aol.co.uk	URL	www.btinternet
No	Is there a set up charge?	No
£14.99	Monthly charges?	£14.99
24/7	When do you get free access?	24/7
No	Are Macs supported?	No
Seven	Number of POP3 email accounts?	Five
14Mb	Amount of free Web space?	10MB
None	What is the cut-off time?	Two hours



FREE ISP

QUICK TEST

EidosNet

www.eidosnet.co.uk

FROM THE COMPANY who gave us the glorious Lara Croft comes an ISP that promises to deliver free Net access with high speed connections. The service is designed with gamers in mind and includes a dial-up to the MPlayer games server allowing users to pit their wits against each other online.

Ease of use ★★★

Getting hooked up to a new ISP online has become as easy as catching a cold these days. EidosNet's straightforward sign-up means you can sort yourself out with free access within about five minutes. For a company who is used to churning out CD-ROMs for PC games, we were surprised that there is no disc available to help you get online.

Tech support ★★★
tel. 0800 328 3368

Finding any sort of online help is almost as challenging as navigating the Tomb Raider labyrinth. Having said this the team at the telephone helpdesk were pretty knowledgeable and friendly, but as they charge 50 pence a minute, the best bet for any non-urgent help is probably the email support.

Features ★★★★★

The bumper package that Eidos has thrown together includes unlimited email addresses, full newsgroup support and a reasonable 20Mb of space for Web pages. However, the clincher for fans of popular online games like Dominion or Commandos is the easy access and support provided for the MPlayer client, which is billed as the "the Internet's fastest growing games server".

Overall ★★★★

This ISP is great for joystick-happy Net users due to the range of gaming related features available. Even if you don't like playing games there is still enough in the way of Web space and email addresses to make this a worthy service provider, although with so many similar free ISPs lurking out there, that these people might not be swayed.

"This ISP is great for joystick-happy Net users"

PAY ISP
QUICK TEST

Easynet Dial

www.easynet.co.uk

YOU MIGHT THINK that paying £11.99 a month for Internet access is sheer lunacy when there are so many providers kicking about that offer Net service on the house. Think again though because, as is the norm in life you get what you pay for and splashing out for Easynet pretty much guarantees you one of the smoothest online rides around.

Practical internet
BEST BUY ★★★★★

Ease of use ★★★★★

As you might gather from its alias, the ISP has been designed with simplicity in mind. The online registration forms can be completed in a few ticks and once you've given those all important credit card details, you'll be sent the start up disc along with all the information on using the various Dial services.

Tech support ★★★★
tel. 0845 333 4444

The online help service is so well structured and easy to follow that you may rarely need to take advantage of the 24/7 national rate telephone support. The online service includes tutorials on configuring your mail client and using Easynet's features and even boasts a mini-guide to creating and publishing a Web site.

Features ★★★★★

Easynet promises its users the holy trinity of Net features with its offer of unlimited email addresses, unlimited Web space and full newsgroup support. As if this wasn't enough your 12 quid also gets you a cocktail of extras like free domain names, dial up statistics, fax services and a personal assistant which forwards voice messages to your email account.

Overall ★★★★★

From the effortless registration process to its bulging sack of impressive Net resources, this ISP is certainly blessed with quality. If you don't mind dipping into your pocket for Internet access then you can sleep easy in the knowledge that you've got a reliable connection plus the ability to take your Web experience as far as you like.

"The online registration can be completed in a few ticks"

NAME AND URL	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL	WEB SPACE	NEWS GROUPS	TECH SUPPORT	128K ISDN
UKLinux www.uklinux.net	0161 477 8848	Unlimited	20MB	35,000+	-	Yes
UKU www.uku.co.uk	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	Full	75p	Yes
Uni Net www.uni-net.co.uk	None	1	No	-	-	Yes
Unisonfree www.unisonfree.net	0906 296 5599	Unlimited	Unlimited	34,000+	25p	Yes
Velnet www.velnet.com	08707 440 151	Unlimited	Unlimited	25,000+	75p	Yes
VeryFree.net www.veryfree.net	0800 028 0433	Unlimited	Unlimited	33,000	National rate	Yes
VirginNet www.virgin.net	0845 650 0000	5	10MB	40,000+	Local rate	Yes
Vispa www.vispa.co.uk	0870 737 9000	Unlimited	15MB	51,000	National rate	Yes
Vodafone.net www.vodafone.net	08080 500 555	2	No	-	60p	Yes
Waitrose.com www.waitrose.com	0800 072 7666	Unlimited	20MB	33,000+	Free	Yes
Waterstones http://waterstones.yahoo.co.uk	0906 302 1200	Unlimited	No	-	50p	No
WEBLeicester www.webleicester.co.uk	0116 223 0070	Unlimited	Unlimited	45,000	Normal BT rate	Yes
Webtribe www.webtribe.net	None	Unlimited	10MB	30,000+	-	Yes
Welshnet www.welshnet.co.uk	None	Unlimited	25MB	56,000+	25p	Yes
WH Smith www.whsmith.co.uk	0345 002 000	Unlimited	12MB	-	50p	Yes
Wireplay www.gameplay.com/wireplay	0845 757 7577	No	No	-	50p	Yes
World Online Tiscali Classic www.worldonline.co.uk	0845 025 0255	Unlimited	25MB	40,000+	50p	Yes
X-Stream www.x-stream.com	0800 358 5678	10	50MB	-	Free	Yes
YahooOnline www.yahoo.co.uk/yahooclick/infopages	0906 302 1200	Unlimited	No	-	50p	Yes
Zoom www.zoom.co.uk	0345 996 600	Unlimited	20MB	35,000	25p	Yes

PAY ISPs

WANT TO PAY FOR YOUR SERVICE PROVIDER AND BE ASSURED OF TOP QUALITY ACCESS? HERE ARE SOME OF THE BEST...

ISP NAME AND URL	COST PER MONTH	EMAIL	WEB SPACE	SUPPORT COSTS	V 90	128K ISDN
BTInternet www.btinternet.com	£9.99	5	10MB	50p	Yes	Yes
Cablenet www.cablenet.net	from £4.95 + vat	Unlimited	50MB	Normal BT rate	Yes	No
CIX www.cix.co.uk	from £6.25 + vat	Unlimited	5MB	Local rate	Yes	Yes
CompuServe www.compuserve.co.uk	£7.50	7	10MB	National rate	Yes	No
Demon www.demon.net	£11.75	Unlimited	20MB	Local rate	Yes	Yes
DirectConnection www.dircon.net	from £4.70	Unlimited	20MB	Local rate	Yes	Yes
Easynet www.easynet.co.uk	£11.99	Unlimited	Unlimited	Local rate	Yes	No
Entanet www.enta.net	£59 + vat per year	Unlimited	20MB	National rate	Yes	Yes
KingstonInternet www.kingston-internet.net	from £5	Unlimited	20MB	Normal BT rate	Yes	No
Netkonect www.netkonect.net	"from £199 per year	Unlimited	Unlimited	National rate	Yes	No
Nildram www.nildram.net	from £5.88	Unlimited	25MB	Normal BT rate	Yes	No
PIPEXDial www.dial.pipex.com	£15	12	50MB	National rate	Yes	Yes
SAQInternet www.saqnet.co.uk	£114.89 + vat per year	Unlimited	5MB	National rate	Yes	Yes
U-NET www.u-net.net	£12	Unlimited	25MB	Local rate	Yes	Yes
Which?Online www.which.net	£7.75	5	5MB	£1	Yes	No
ZooInternet www.zoo.co.uk	from £6.95	2	5MB	National rate	Yes	No

BROADBAND/ADSL ISPs

GET SUPER-FAST, ALWAYS-ON NET ACCESS FROM THESE BROADBAND SERVICE PROVIDERS

NAME AND URL	CONNECTION	INSTALLATION FEE	COST (P/M)	DOWNLOAD SPEEDS	EMAIL	WEB SPACE	NEWS GROUPS
Alcom Internix (business) www.adsl-internet-access.co.uk	ADSL	£260	From £89.95 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Extra	Extra	Yes
Andrews & Arnold (consumer) http://aa.nu	ADSL	£150 (ex VAT)	£45 (ex VAT)	512Kbps	Unlimited	Unlimited	Yes
AppleOnline (consumer) www.appleonline.net	ADSL	£150	£40	512Kbps	Unlimited	25MB	Yes
Atlantic Telecom www.atlantic-telecom.com	Wireless	-	£49.99	2Mbps	5	50MB	Yes
Beyond Access (business) www.beyondaccess.co.uk	ADSL	£260 (ex VAT)	See site	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	100MB	Yes

IN ASSOCIATION WITH www.net4nowt.com net4nowt

NAME AND URL	CONNECTION	INSTALLATION FEE	COST (P/M)	DOWNLOAD SPEEDS	EMAIL	WEB SPACE	128K ISDN
BT Openworld (consumer) www.btopenworld.com	ADSL	£150	£39.99	500Kbps	10	20MB	Yes
ClaraNet (business) www.clara.net	ADSL	£260 (ex VAT)	From £100 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	15	80MB	Yes
Colt (business) www.oncolt.com	ADSL	£260 (ex VAT)	From £127 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	10MB	Yes
Demon (business) www.demon.net	ADSL	£250 (ex VAT)	From £95 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	20MB	Yes
Easynet (business) www.uk.easynet.net	ADSL	£275 (ex VAT)	From £79 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	10	?	?
Eclipse Networking (consumer) www.eclipse.net.uk	ADSL	£150 (ex VAT)	£49 (ex VAT)	512Kbps	5	10MB	Yes
FDD (business) www.fdd.co.uk	ADSL	£270	From £100	From 512Kbps	5	50MB	Yes
Freedom2Surf (business) www.freedom2surf.net	ADSL	£279 (ex VAT)	From £85 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	25MB	Yes
Freenetname (consumer & SME) www.freenetname.co.uk	ADSL	TBA	TBA	TBA	Unlimited	20MB	Yes
Freeserve (consumer) www.freeserve.com	ADSL	£150	£39.99	512Kbps	Unlimited	15MB	Yes
InfY (business) www.infy.net	ADSL	From £99 (ex VAT)	From £99 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	5MB	Yes
Inweb (business) www.inweb.net.uk	ADSL	£275 (ex VAT)	From £99.99 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	10MB	Yes
Iomart (consumer) www.iomartdsl.com	ADSL	£180	£45.83	512Kbps	Unlimited	25MB	Yes
Jings (business) www.jings.com	ADSL	£317.25	From £170	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	Unlimited	Yes
Madasafish (consumer) www.madasafish.com	ADSL	£180	£39.99	512Kbps	Unlimited	Unlimited	Yes
Mistral (business) www.mistral.co.uk	ADSL	£260 (ex VAT)	See notes	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	100MB	Yes
Netscalibur (business) www.netscalibur.co.uk	ADSL	£275 (ex VAT)	From £115 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	20MB	Yes
NewNet (business) www.newnet.co.uk	ADSL	£260 (ex VAT)	From £110 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	100MB	Yes
Nildram (business) www.getadsl.co.uk	ADSL	From £150 (ex VAT)	From £50 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	10MB	Yes
NTL www.ntl.co.uk	Cable	See notes	£19.99	512Kbps	5	10MB	Yes
Onyx Internet (business) www.onyx.net	ADSL	£300 (ex VAT)	From £100 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	25MB	Yes
Pipemedia OnLine (business) www.adsl.uk.net	ADSL	£200 (ex VAT)	From £117 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	50MB	Yes
PlusNet (consumer) www.plus.net	ADSL	£150	£45	512Kbps	Unlimited	Unlimited	Yes
Quik Internet (business) www.quikinternet.co.uk	ADSL	£260 (ex VAT)	From £127 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	10	No	Yes
Realtouch (business) www.realtouch.net	Satellite	"£3,995 (ex VAT)"	£350 (ex VAT)	300Kbps	Unlimited	No	Yes
SkyStorm www.skystorm.net	Satellite	£50	£15 (ex VAT)	400Kbps	No	No	Yes
StarSpeeder www.starspeeder.co.uk	Satellite	£160 (ex VAT)	£15 (ex VAT)	400Kbps	TBA	TBA	TBA
Supanet www.supanet.com	ADSL	£260 (ex VAT)	From £98 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	20MB	Yes
SurfAnytime (business) www.surfanytime.co.uk	ADSL	£260 (ex VAT)	From £99.99 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	15	10MB	Yes
Tele2 (consumer) www.tele2.co.uk	Wireless	£99.99	£19.99	150Kbps	Unlimited	15MB	Yes
Telewest (Blueyonder) www.telewest.co.uk	Cable	£50	£33	512Kbps	15	30MB	Yes
Timewarp (consumer) www.timewarp.co.uk	ADSL	£150 (ex VAT)	£50 (ex VAT)	512Kbps	Unlimited	10MB	Yes
Vispa (business) www.vispaconnect.co.uk	ADSL	£286 (ex VAT)	From £94 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	15MB	Yes
World Online (consumer) www.worldonline.co.uk/adsl	ADSL	£150	£39.99	512Kbps	Unlimited	25MB	Yes
Zen (business) www.zenadsl.com	ADSL	£260 (ex VAT)	From £110 (ex VAT)	From 512Kbps	Unlimited	100MB	Yes

ISP NEWS BYTES

ECOSSETEL TO OFFER FRIACO SERVICES

Scottish ISP EcosseTel (**www.ecossetel.net**) is finally set to roll out its FRIACO services. Two packages are currently available: Vroom2 and Bcom-Xtra. The former is aimed at your occasional to standard Web user, a limit of 200 hours a month – anything extra is charged at a penny a minute. This service is priced at £79.99 a year. The 'Bcom-Xtra' service is aimed more at business or heavy residential users. Charged at £14.99 a month, there are no time limitations, giving users 24/7 access. Both services are available across the UK, although we recommend you visit the Web site just to see the scary child which bears an uncanny resemblance to our Technical Editor.

24/7 TO THE ARSENAL

North London football giants Arsenal FC (**www.arsenal.com**) has launched its own unmetered ISP for its supporters. The club has been providing a standard 0845 service since late 1998, but this announcement means it will join the elite FRIACO band of merry ISPs. The service is based on the FRIACO-based Internet Access from Affinity Internet, which has supplied Arsenal with its ISP offerings since it began. The package is set to cost a relatively meagre £12.99 a month, ensuring that even the most dedicated of Tottenham fans might be tempted to take the plunge, and sign up to his deadly red rivals.

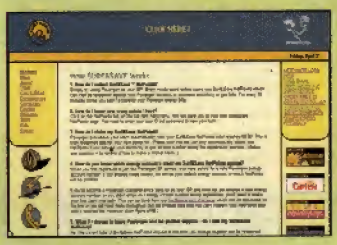
FREE ISP

QUICK TEST

Surf & Save

www.surfandsave.co.uk

THANKS TO THIS ISP, you can now save money off gas and leccy bills while browsing the Net. The service is run by the energy goliath Powergen, who will knock a penny off customers' bills for every 10 minutes spent online. A crafty marketing gimmick? Well maybe, but it's still a good idea.



Ease of use ★★★

Joining up is no sweat, it's just a case of downloading the dialler and then following the on-screen instructions to configure the dial-up. If you're a Powergen customer then you'll need a bill at the ready to enter your account number in order to qualify for the discount-fest. If you can't be bothered with the download you can request a CD version of the software.

Tech support
tel. 0500 240500 ★★★

A helping hand is never more than a phone call away, even halfway through of an all night Internet session thanks to the magic of 24 hour telephone support. The staff seem pretty clued up, but at 50p a minute you could be jeopardising all your efforts to cut down the bills.

Features ★★★★

While the 10Mb of Web space and five email addresses aren't going to cause people to swoon in amazement, you do get lots of free Net software when you join such as IE5, Media Ring and games. The service also boasts a free 30-day trial of NetNanny to keep the kiddies in check.

Overall ★★★★

If you get your gas or electric through Powergen then Surf & Save is definitely one service provider that you should consider. Although the savings aren't massive (6p off your bill per hour online) it's probably worth it if you spend a lot of your time online.

"While the 10Mb of Web space and five email addresses aren't spectacular, you do get lots of free Net software"

BUYERS' GUIDE

IMPROVE YOUR INTERNET EXPERIENCE WITH THESE ADD-ONS AND EXTRAS – ALL TRIED AND TESTED BY PRACTICAL INTERNET'S EXPERTS

Buying new hardware and software for your PC or Mac can be a tricky task. You often have to choose between products which cost the same price and seem to offer identical features. What's more, high street shops often encourage you to buy the most expensive products – even though they may be unsuitable for you.

This is why we've compiled the *Practical Internet* Buyers' Guide. It's been written with Net users in mind and features products, organised by type, that enhance your Web browsing experience.

The kinds of products we look at include external modems, Webcams, WYSIWYG designers, graphics packages, software, hardware and MP3 players. We've published more detailed reports on these products in the past, so if you want more information, take a note of the issue number shown at the top of each section, then turn to page 177 or call **01202 200 200** to order a back copy.

The information here is updated every month, but please note, however, that all of the prices are only guidelines provided by the manufacturers, so shop around on the Web to find yourself the very best deal.

KEYBOARDS (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 54)

Logitech Internet Keyboard

Price
£20

Contact
020 7309 0127 www.logitech.com

What's good?
Highly useful 'Internet' keys to help you browse the Web. Comes with a wrist-rest

What's bad?
Not as fully-featured as some other keyboards

Overall ★★★★★

Logitech Desktop iTouch

Price
£80

Contact
020 7309 0127 www.logitech.com

What's good?
A cordless keyboard and mouse combination so you can work away from your PC.

What's bad?
It's a bit expensive. Do you know anyone who'd spend almost 80 notes on a keyboard?

Overall ★★★★

Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro

Price
£50

Contact
03450 002000 www.microsoft.com

What's good?
Most comfortable of all keyboards we tested. 16 function buttons.

What's bad?
Still a bit on the pricey side

Overall ★★★★★

Ultimate 2000

Price
£25

Contact
0870 4580011 www.euro-tech.co.uk

What's good?
Comes with free cordless mouse. Function keys give you 18 predetermined actions

What's bad?
Doesn't come with a wrist-rest

Overall ★★★★

EZKey EZ3000 Smart Keyboard

Price
approx £20-£30

Contact
01952 299882 www.agci.co.uk

What's good?
21 additional function keys. Curved space bar.

What's bad?
Looks a little too much like an iMac keyboard. Potentially dodgy installation software

Overall ★★★★

MP3 PLAYERS (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 50)

Sonic Blue Rio600

Price
£170

Contact
01189 444400 www.diamondmm.co.uk

What's good?
Several playback modes. Vibrant and pacy sound. Expandable up to 340Mb.

What's bad?
Only 32Mb memory as standard.

Overall ★★★★★

Iomega HipZip

Price
£290

Contact
(020) 7365 9527 www.iomega-europe.com

What's good?
Uses removable media instead of Flash memory, which is much cheaper.

What's bad?
Bulkier and heavier than the Rio. Expensive.

Overall ★★★★

Creative Labs DAP Jukebox

Price
£350

Contact
(012450) 265265 www.nomadworld.com

What's good?
Holds up to 6Gb of music, equivalent to 100 hours of music.

What's bad?
Larger than most players. Eats up batteries. Can't transfer MP3s back to PC.

Overall ★★★★

Smart MP3 Player

Price
£124

Contact
(020) 8668 0016 www.jedan.co.uk

What's good?
Plays both normal and MP3 CDs. Decent sound quality.

What's bad?
Very odd interface. Not compatible with WMA or supplied with encoding software.

Overall ★★★★

Samsung Yepp YP-NEU

Price
£230

Contact
(0800) 521652 www.yepparty.com

What's good?
Looks rather beautiful. Comes supplied with 64Mb of memory.

What's bad?
Poor sound. Sparse features. Limited LCD display of information.

Overall ★★★★

COMPUTER MICE (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 51)

Wacom Grafire

Price
£85

Contact
020 8358 5858 www.wacom.co.uk

What's good?
A graphics tablet with cordless mouse and wand. Great for graphics manipulation

What's bad?
Takes a bit of getting used to. Not cheap

Overall ★★★★★

Logitech iFeel Mouseman

Price
£40

Contact
020 7309 0127 www.logitech.com

What's good?
Ball-less mouse, so no need for a mouse mat. Users can 'feel' buttons on the page.

What's bad?
Still a bit pricey for what it does. The 'feel' aspect is limited.

Overall ★★★★

Vivanco T-Light Mouse

Price
£10

Contact
01442 403020 www.vivanco.com

What's good?
Cheap, cheerful and adequate. Ambidextrous design.

What's bad?
The scroll wheel is somewhat wishy-washy

Overall ★★★★

Kensington TurboRing

Price
£40

Contact
0800 252359 www.kensington.com

What's good?
Full-featured trackball device, which can be used by left or right-handers

What's bad?
Cumbersome to the beginner. Picks up dust like nobody's business

Overall ★★★★

Microsoft Trackball Optical

Price
£35

Contact
0345 000 2000 www.microsoft.com

What's good?
A standard mouse with added trackball functionality. Very resilient

What's bad?
Absolutely no use to anyone left handed.

Overall ★★★★

SCANNERS (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 53)

Microtek ScanMaker 4600

Price
£116

Contact
01908 317797 www.microtek.nl

What's good?
Standard and advanced modes. Prints are sharp and rich in colour. Works on Mac.

What's bad?
Not the quickest scanner in the world.

Overall ★★★★

HP5370c

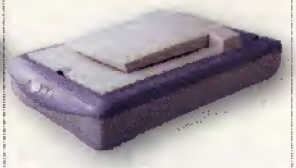
Price
£179

Contact
08705 474747 www.hp.com/uk

What's good?
Quick, and image quality is excellent, with impressive colour fidelity.

What's bad?
The interface isn't the most friendly we've seen

Overall ★★★★★



Epson 1240u Photo

Price
£229

Contact
0800 220546 www.epson.co.uk

What's good?
Has a transparency adaptor. Scans have Accurate colours, plenty of detail

What's bad?
Expensive. Aimed at experts.

Overall ★★★★

Agfa e50

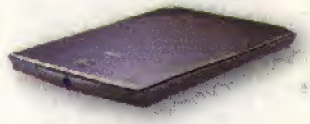
Price
£199

Contact
020 8231 4903 www.agfa.co.uk

What's good?
Good-looking, well-made scanner. Produces excellent scans quickly and easily.

What's bad?
Slow in comparison to the other scanners on test.

Overall ★★★★



Canon N656U

Price
£116

Contact
0121 680 8062 www.canon.co.uk

What's good?
Doesn't need a separate mains unit. Compact.

What's bad?
Average scanning speed. Scans are nothing special.

Overall ★★★★

PCMCIA MODEMS (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 41)

Zoom PC Card 56k Dual Mode

Price
£79.99

Contact
0870 720 0060 www.zoom.com

What's good?
The cheapest modem on test, and the most reliable and easiest to install.

What's bad?
Supplied software is for Windows only.

Overall ★★★★

Eicon Diva Mobile V.90 Card

Price
£229

Contact
0208 967 8080 www.eicon.com

What's good?
The Eicon provides impressive performance and boasts an ISDN 2 terminal adaptor.

What's bad?
It's an expensive luxury.

Overall ★★★★

Xircom RealPort 56 Card

Price
£141

Contact
01256 332552 www.xircom.com

What's good?
It's neither cheap nor expensive, so the Xircom is a middle-of-the-range modem.

What's bad?
Very lacklustre in performance and the speaker appeared to be faulty.

Overall ★★★

Psion Dacom Gold Card Global 56k

Price
£199

Contact
01908 261 686 www.psiondacom.com

What's good?
The Dacom is very user friendly and easy to install.

What's bad?
Not great value for money and refused to connect to one of our test ISPs at V.90.

Overall ★★★★

Hayes Optima V.90

Price
£209

Contact
0870 720 0060 www.hayes.co.uk

What's good?
Plenty of features and easy to install. The Optima provided reasonable speeds.

What's bad?
Didn't integrate well with all ISPs and expensive for what you get.

Overall ★★★

DIGITAL CAMERAS (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 52)

Kodak DC3800

Price
£349

Contact
0870 243 0270 www.kodak.co.uk

What's good?
Uses a handy USB card reader. High quality LCD screen. Usual good Kodak menu system.

What's bad?
No way of tweaking exposure. JPEG is only storage format.

Overall ★★★★

Nikon Coolpix 880

Price
£680

Contact
0800 230220 www.nikon.co.uk

What's good?
Impressive 3.34 megapixel count. Loads of features. Compact and nice to handle.

What's bad?
It's not that cheap.

Overall ★★★★★

Olympus C990 Zoom

Price
£441

Contact
0800 720070 www.olympus.co.uk

What's good?
Features an excellent image playback function. Uncompressed TIFF mode.

What's bad?
Bizarre shutter method. Bulky, to say the least.

Overall ★★★★

Canon Digital Ixus

Price
£139

Contact
0121 680 8062 www.canon.co.uk

What's good?
Small and stylish. Good zoom lens. Excellent image quality.

What's bad?
A triumph of style over substance.

Overall ★★★★

Fuji Finepix40i

Price
£466

Contact
0207 465 5745 www.fujifilm.co.uk

What's good?
Doubles up as an MP3 player. Offers the same quality as a 4-megapixel camera.

What's bad?
Only comes supplied with 8Mb of SmartMedia memory.

Overall ★★★

MONITORS (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 44)

CTX VL710T

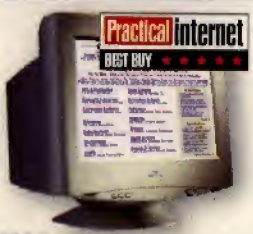
Price
£193.88

Contact
01943 810800 www.ctxeurope.com

What's good?
A well priced monitor with no onscreen flicker. It benefits from a fairly flat screen.

What's bad?
It has few connections and no USB hub that's featured on pricier models.

Overall ★★★★



ADI MicroScan

Price
£269.08

Contact
020 8327 1900 www.adieurope.com

What's good?
A pleasantly-styled monitor with a built-in microphone. It has a four-port USB hub.

What's bad?
Expensive – but that's the price of buying a top quality monitor.

Overall ★★★★★

Ilyama A705MT

Price
£245.56

Contact
01438 745482 www.ilyama.co.uk

What's good?
You get the option of buying a monitor stand that incorporates a USB hub.

What's bad?
Features are thin on the ground and the user interface is not very 'friendly'.

Overall ★★★★

Sony E200

Price
£276.13

Contact
0990 424424 www.sony-europe.com

What's good?
This monitor boasts a 17-inch flat screen tube and very easy-to-use onscreen menus.

What's bad?
No microphones and no hubs. The screen refresh rate at max res is a flickery 65Hz.

Overall ★★★★

Philips 107B

Price
£276.13

Contact
0208 689 4444 www.pcstuff.philips.com

What's good?
A compact 17in monitor, you can alter the screen settings from Windows.

What's bad?
The screen is not completely flat and thus some errors are introduced. It's also pricey.

Overall ★★★★

WAP PHONES (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 45)

Sony CMD–Z5

Price
£150

Contact
0990 111999 www.sony.co.uk

What's good?
Very small and compact. Capable of viewing HTML pages. Decent email facility.

What's bad?
Display is probably just too small for comfort. Not all WAP sites can be viewed.

Overall ★★★★

Mitsubishi Trium Geo@

Price
£100

Contact
01707 276100 www.trium-gsm.com

What's good?
First WAP phone in UK to offer 'prepay' package. Easy navigation. Reliable.

What's bad?
The phone itself might be big, but the display isn't. Tacky and lightweight build.

Overall ★★★★

Motorola TimePort P7389

Price
£140

Contact
0500 555555 www.mot.com

What's good?
Infra-red port to communicate with PC or PDA. Battery life and audio quality are good.

What's bad?
No joypad or anything. Confused display. Bookmarking sites is really complicated.

Overall ★★★

Siemens C35

Price
£20-£30

Contact
0345 400700 www.siemens.co.uk

What's good?
Well-designed menus, simple navigation buttons. Easy to bookmark.

What's bad?
Only capable of displaying three lines of text. Big and chunky handset.

Overall ★★★★

Nokia 7110

Price
£100-£130

Contact
0990 002110 www.nokia.com

What's good?
Large screen, which is always clear and readable. NaviRoller is perfect for navigation.

What's bad?
There are cheaper handsets on the market. Apart from that, nowt.

Overall ★★★★★

PDAS (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 47)

HP Jornada 545

Price
£369

Contact
08705 474747 www.hp.com/jornada

What's good?
Handy for transferring files or images quickly. Fairly quick processor inside.

What's bad?
Has a Type-1 slot, so is incompatible with some devices. Not enough RAM on board.

Overall ★★★★

Palm Inc Palm V

Price
£249

Contact
020 7365 9820 www.palm.com

What's good?
Inexpensive. The 'graffiti' handwriting recognition tool works exceptionally well.

What's bad?
Uninspiring display. RAM isn't backed up, so backing up is essential for keeping data.

Overall ★★★★

Nokia p110i Communicator

Price
£280

Contact
0990 002110 www.nokia.com

What's good?
Cellphone is built in. Crisp, high-resolution display is nothing short of superb.

What's bad?
The cellular functionality is somewhat behind the times these days.

Overall ★★★★

Handspring Visor Deluxe

Price
£199

Contact
020 7309 0314 www.handspring.com

What's good?
Stunning design. Highly expandable. Good value for money.

What's bad?
Resolution of display isn't as crisp or sharp as with other PDAs.

Overall ★★★★★

Psion Series 5MX

Price
£429

Contact
0990 143050 www.series5mx.com

What's good?
Nifty greyscale display. The 5mx keyboard is the best around at the moment.

What's bad?
Much more expensive than other, similarly featured, PDAs on the market.

Overall ★★★★★

WEBCAMS (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 48)

Philips Vesto Pro

Price
£60-£70 inc VAT

Contact
020 8689 4444 www.pcstuff.philips.com

What's good?
Attractive little camera, with a good resolution. Natural colour.

What's bad?
It's difficult to keep steady because the locking screw comes loose a lot.

Overall ★★★★★

Pinecam Z100

Price
£50

Contact
01908 218812 www.pinegroup.com

What's good?
Eh, a few controls to make your captures look a bit better?

What's bad?
Pretty much everything. No instructions, flimsy, difficult to operate.

Overall ★★

Logitech Quickcam Web

Price
£59.99

Contact
020 7309 0127 www.logitech.com

What's good?
As cute as you like. Get free Web space and streaming with Spotlife.

What's bad?
Average picture quality. TWAIN problems. Can prove a nightmare.

Overall ★★★

Creative WebCam Go Plus

Price
£129

Contact
01245 265265 www.europe.creative.com

What's good?
Innovative design. Can be used as a digital camera. Good range of features.

What's bad?
Expensive. The digital camera aspect is a tad gimmicky.

Overall ★★★★

Agfa CL18

Price
£100

Contact
0208 231 4903 www.agfa.co.uk

What's good?
A Webcam and digital camera. Can display images on a TV. Good value.

What's bad?
No LCD display. Not the best resolution in the world.

Overall ★★★★

EXTERNAL MODEMS (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 49)

Hayes Accura 56k

Price
£70

Contact
0870 720 006 www.zoomhayes.co.uk

What's good?
Fairly quick. From the original 'intelligent' modem makers.

What's bad?
Looks as dull as you like. Good, but in no way great.

Overall ★★★

Olitech Self-Memory Pro

Price
£80

Contact
0870 720 006 www.euro-tech.co.uk

What's good?
Lets you retrieve POP3 email when your PC is turned off. Loads of features.

What's bad?
Unintuitive and unfriendly user interface.

Overall ★★★★★

Diamond Supra-Max 56 USB

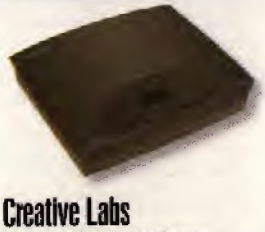
Price
£50

Contact
01189 444400 www.diamondmm.co.uk

What's good?
Compact. Uses your PC's power supply to run. Fast.

What's bad?
Not that easy to use. No 'hands-free' phone usage here.

Overall ★★★★



Creative Labs Modemblaster Externa

Price
£59

Contact
0800 973069 www.europe.creative.com

What's good?
Capable of turning your PC into a flexible answerphone.

What's bad?
Unusual styling. No USB. Works best with a microphone, which isn't supplied as standard.

Overall ★★★★

US Robotics Professional Message Modem

Price
£120

Contact
0800 225252 www.3com.co.uk

What's good?
2Mb of internal memory. Mic and speaker built-in.

What's bad?
Expensive, large and scary-looking.

Overall ★★★

WEB SITE DESIGN PACKAGES (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 50)

HoTMetaL Pro 6

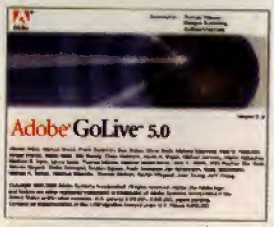
Price
£79

Contact
020 8387 4110 www.hotmetalpro.com

What's good?
Inexpensive program with expensive looking features

What's bad?
The integration of HTML might bamboozle beginners

Overall ★★★★



Adobe GoLive 5

Price
£229

Contact
020 8606 4000 www.adobe.co.uk

What's good?
Vastly impressive range of features. Easy to pick up and use

What's bad?
Not cheap. Still unlikely to win over Dreamweaver die hards

Overall ★★★★

FrontPage Express

Price
Free

Contact
0345 002000 www.microsoft.com

What's good?
Free. Gives you decent Web pages

What's bad?
Nothing much in the way of advanced features

Overall ★★★

Dreamweaver 4

Price
£299+VAT

Contact
020 8358 5857 www.macromedia.com

What's good?
Millions of features. Will make even the most jaded of Webmasters excited

What's bad?
Costs over £300. Nothing much else really

Overall ★★★★★

NetObjects Fusion 5

Price
£205 + VAT

Contact
0800 0289851 www.netobjects.co.uk

What's good?
Easy to set up your own site in no time whatsoever

What's bad?
Expensive for beginners. Strangely difficult to use at times

Overall ★★★

SITE SUBMISSION SOFTWARE (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 54)

BuildTraffic Pro

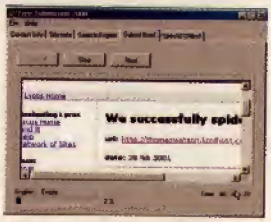
Price
£14

Contact
www.buildtraffic.com

What's good?
Cheap enough. Powerful and easy to use.

What's bad?
Unappealing interface. Exaggerated claims.

Overall ★★★★



Free Submission 2000

Price
Free

Contact
www.tweaknow.com

What's good?
It's free. Easy to pick up and use. Gets results.

What's bad?
Doesn't pack a massive range of features.

Overall ★★★

Site Submitter Pro

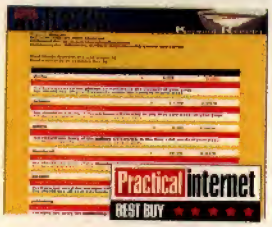
Price
£38

Contact
http://submitter.sitesoftware.com

What's good?
Allows you slightly more control than some other programs.

What's bad?
Not worth the money. Interface is sometimes fiddly.

Overall ★★



Web Site Traffic Builder

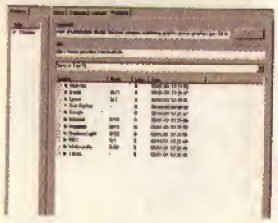
Price
£49.95

Contact
www.guildsoft.co.uk

What's good?
It's easy to use and gets results.

What's bad?
Pricier than other programs.

Overall ★★★★★



Submit Wolf Pro

Price
£99.95

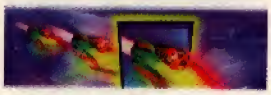
Contact
www.trellian.com

What's good?
Does a good enough job.

What's bad?
Too many bloody wolf pictures.

Overall ★★★★

WEB ANIMATION PACKAGES (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 47)



LiveMotion 1.0

Price
£189+VAT

Contact
www.adobe.com

What's good?
Intuitive. Easy to get to grips with. Outputs SWF files. Has the standard Adobe interface.

What's bad?
Not quite as powerful as its Macromedia equivalent.

Overall ★★★★

Director 8

Price
£799

Contact
www.macromedia.com

What's good?
Unparalleled range of features. Capable of doing quite incredible things.

What's bad?
Not what you could ever call cheap. For experts only really.

Overall ★★★★

SWiSH 1.51

Price
$30 (approx £20)

Contact
www.swishzone.com

What's good?
Dead dead cheap. Lets you create Flash files quickly and easily.

What's bad?
Only works with text. Limited features.

Overall ★★★★

Flash 5

Price
£259

Contact
www.macromedia.com

What's good?
Impressive and powerful program. Creates animations and menus with tiny files.

What's bad?
The interface takes a bit of getting used to, and may infuriate newcomers.

Overall ★★★★★

LiveStage 1.0

Price
$300 (approx £200)

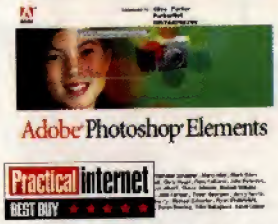
Contact
www.totallyhip.com

What's good?
Capable of excellent results. Uses something other than the Flash format.

What's bad?
Confusing interface. Not really that cheap.

Overall ★★★★

WEB GRAPHICS PACKAGES



Adobe Photoshop Elements

Price
£79

Contact
020 8606 4000 www.adobe.co.uk

What's good?
The greatest graphics program on the go, bar none. Unparalleled level of features. Cheap too!

What's bad?
Nothing. This is an excellent all-round package suitable for all levels of PC user.

Overall ★★★★★

Photo Objects 50,000

Price
£59.99

Contact
01256 707767 www.hemera.com

What's good?
Brilliant collection of photographs, all vector-based, so you can blow them up to any size.

What's bad?
For sixty quid, what else do you want?

Overall ★★★★★

Fireworks 3

Price
£139

Contact
020 8358 5857 www.macromedia.com

What's good?
Very tasty at helping you make animated GIFs for menus and general Web site niceness.

What's bad?
Again, a tad on the pricey side. Quite overpowering for the beginner.

Overall ★★★★

Jasc Paint Shop Pro 7.0

Price
£79.95

Contact
01295 258335 www.digitalworkshop.co.uk

What's good?
Cheap, user friendly and easy to use. A dream for those new to the world of graphics.

What's bad?
Doesn't offer the same depth of features as Photoshop.

Overall ★★★★

Adobe Illustrator 9.0

Price
£111

Contact
020 8606 4000 www.adobe.co.uk

What's good?
The vector graphics creation package of choice. Exceedingly powerful. Quite cheap.

What's bad?
Takes a good while to get the better of.

Overall ★★★★

ECOMMERCE PACKAGES (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 52)

eGenie

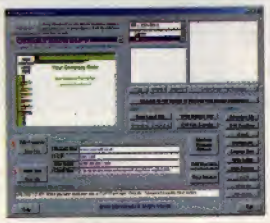
Price
£275

Contact
www.egenie.co.uk

What's good?
Beginner-friendly. Very easy to pick up and use.

What's bad?
Inflexible in the long run. Not what you could call cheap.

Overall ★★★



NetShop Lite

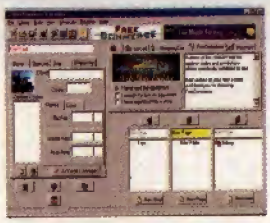
Price
£49

Contact
www.solarsoft.uk.com

What's good?
Easy to set up your site

What's bad?
Have to pay big money for secure transaction facilities.

Overall ★★★★



FreeCommerce

Price
Free

Contact
www.magicfactory.net

What's good?
It's free!

What's bad?
Has some completely bizarre idiosyncracies.

Overall ★★★★

Actinic

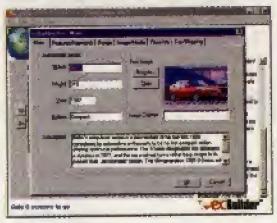
Price
£410

Contact
www.actinic.co.uk

What's good?
Unparalleled range of features and control. Produces stunning results.

What's bad?
Might seem a bit pricey to beginners.

Overall ★★★★★



ec Builder

Price
£351.33

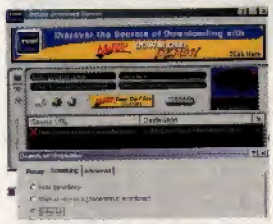
Contact
www.ecbuilder.co.uk

What's good?
An easy fill in the blanks approach. Lots of features and options.

What's bad?
Quite expensive. No password protection on the data files.

Overall ★★★★

DOWNLOAD MANAGERS (REVIEWED IN ISSUE 43)



NetZip Download Demon

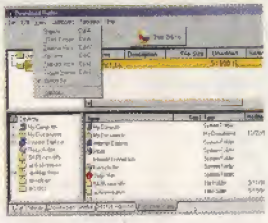
Price
$29.99

Contact
www.netzip.com/products/info_demon.html

What's good?
More than enough features to be getting on with. Sexy interface.

What's bad?
Not as good as Go!Zilla. Prone to odd glitches. Close, but no cigar.

Overall ★★★★



Download Butler

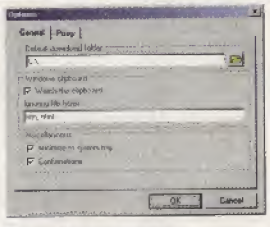
Price
$29.99

Contact
www.lincolnbeach.com/butler.asp

What's good?
A whole load of unique features. Very easy to set up.

What's bad?
Complex and poorly designed.

Overall ★



Mass Downloader

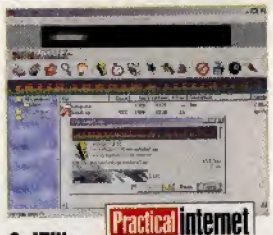
Price
Free

Contact
www.geocities.com/siliconvalley/vista/2865/md

What's good?
It's simple to use and significantly speeds up your downloads.

What's bad?
Features are thin on the ground and the user interface is not very 'friendly'.

Overall ★★★★



Go!Zilla

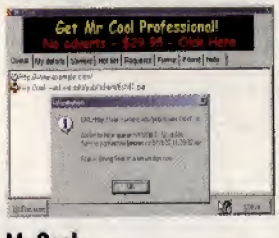
Price
Free

Contact
www.gozilla.com

What's good?
A truly wonderful free download manager that outperforms costly programs by a country mile.

What's bad?
Doesn't speed up your download time.

Overall ★★★★★



Mr Cool

Price
Free

Contact
www. netservs.com/mrcool

What's good?
An interesting idea that should make the download process more bearable.

What's bad?
Appaling interface, difficult to use. We couldn't get it to work.

Overall ★★

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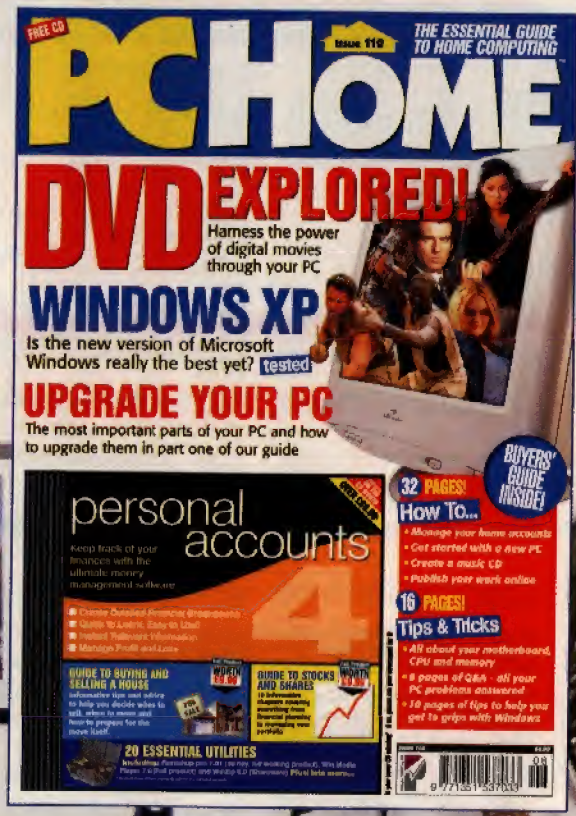

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3. SAY MY NAME	102937	✓	✓	✓
4. YOU MAKE ME SICK	118263	✓		
5. I WANNA BE YOU	143149	✓		✓

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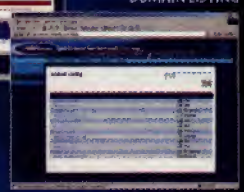

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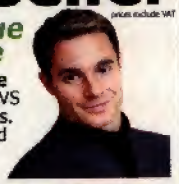

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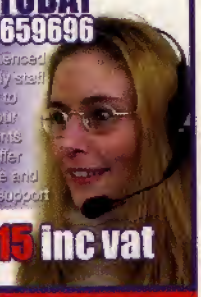

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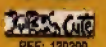
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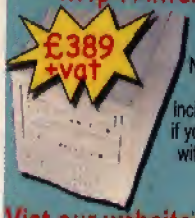

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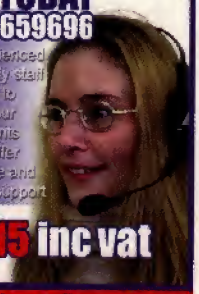

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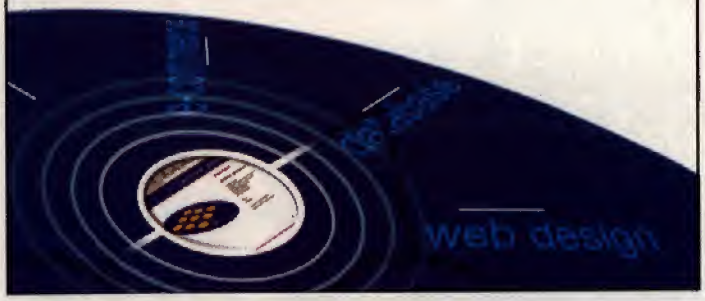

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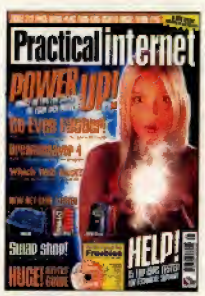

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JO CHIPCHASE ON WHETHER WAP'S FANTASTIC, OR SIMPLY DRASTIC

WAP might not be the most sexy feature on your handset... bring on those MP3s

Put off by WAP's general air of underperformance, I remained, until recently, outside the 7% of the UK population† that owns a WAP phone. As this just wouldn't do, I decided to peruse a few WAPtastic sites, with help from a rather slinky Siemens SL45 WAP-enabled handset that doubles up as an MP3 player (in hindsight, I think the latter feature is more exciting). Armed with the new piece of kit I investigated the burning issue of "is WAP really crap".

For starters, WAP – accessed, in my case, through Vodafone's Vizzavi service – crawls along like a slug on Valium, which is hardly a good thing at 10p a minute. Furthermore, if you don't have dainty fingers and tend to hit the keys in the wrong order (which I did continuously), 'navigation' turns into slogging backwards and forwards in a constant download process.

Beaten by my neighbour's eight-year-old son... whatever is the world coming to?

Perhaps I'm challenged in the area of manual dexterity? The talented boys at Wapscallion (wap.wapscallion.net) are doing particularly well with their WAP games. A visit to Wapscallion proved that I couldn't figure out how to play the darn things, while my neighbour's eight-year-old son excels. I obviously need a handset the size of a brick.

Moving on to something less demanding, I embarked upon a simple search for information. I soon discovered that Vizzaviz's search engine favours content from the Ananova news service (www.ananova.com), which isn't too thrilling on the Web and is even duller when viewed in plain text. My deliberate attempt to liven up the content failed to hit the mark. A search for 'sex' came up with XXXwap, which invited viewers to ring premium phone lines. A search for 'drugs' returned a plethora of results from Ananova (surprise!), and a link to a site that warned about getting out of it at Glastonbury. 'Rock and roll' came up with some contact ads for swingers (whatever happened to Jimi Hendrix?).

WAP seems to be best for finding information you require that very minute, such as where to eat and drink in a particular town. A good night out isn't complete without a curry (!?), and I had an element of success here. Currypages (wap.currypages.com) lets you search for a curry house by town or postcode. I found 17 spicy emporiums for Brighton, although both of my local curry houses were missing. A search for 'pubs' revealed a reasonable breadth of content too. Sadly, I failed to find the site described to me by Yusuf of The Wap Group (www.thewapgroup.com), which shows you the location of the nearest toilet.

While WAP should take off with the advent of 3G handsets, and when the industry giants decide to provide decent content, at present it's not exciting enough to make you whoop, puke, or show any strong emotion other than frustration. You'll simply be bored while the content downloads and then await your phone bill with trepidation. Personally, I'd rather do something else – such as talk to people using the handset (that old function of a mobile device... sheesh!).

† According to The Wap Group, March 2001

Jo Chipchase runs Can-U-Hack-It, a Brighton-based new media company, and is a regular editorial contributor to Practical Internet

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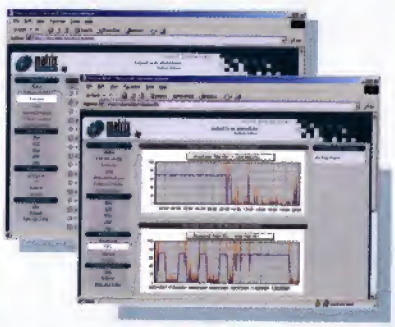

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